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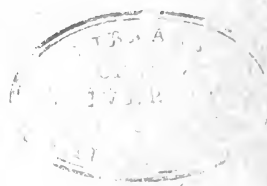
THE BELGIAN DEPORTATIONS

BY

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

WITH A STATEMENT BY

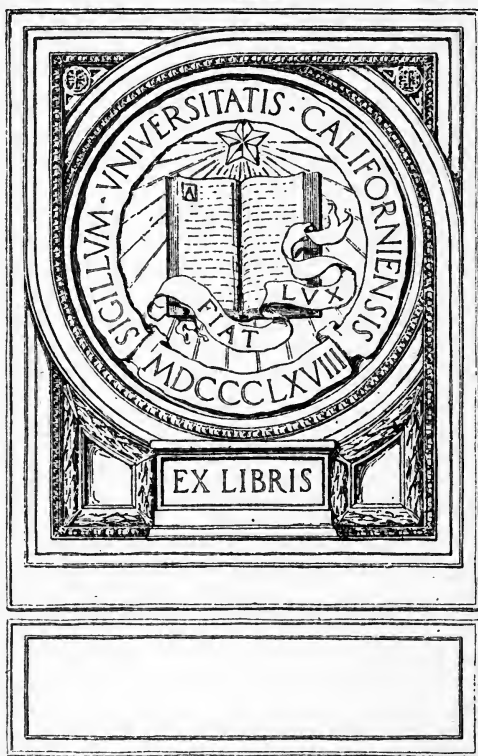
VISCOUNT BRYCE



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THE BELGIAN DEPORTATIONS

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ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

WITH A STATEMENT BY

VISCOUNT BRYCE

“In a few months’ time our working population, the pride of our free country, will be annihilated by forced labour. On the day when peace will be restored, there will be scarcely any Belgian workmen left who will be capable of taking up the great work of the economic reconstruction of what was once prosperous Belgium, whose only crime has been to defend her right as a neutral, her life and her honour.”—*Appeal of the Belgian Workmen to the Workmen of All Nations.*

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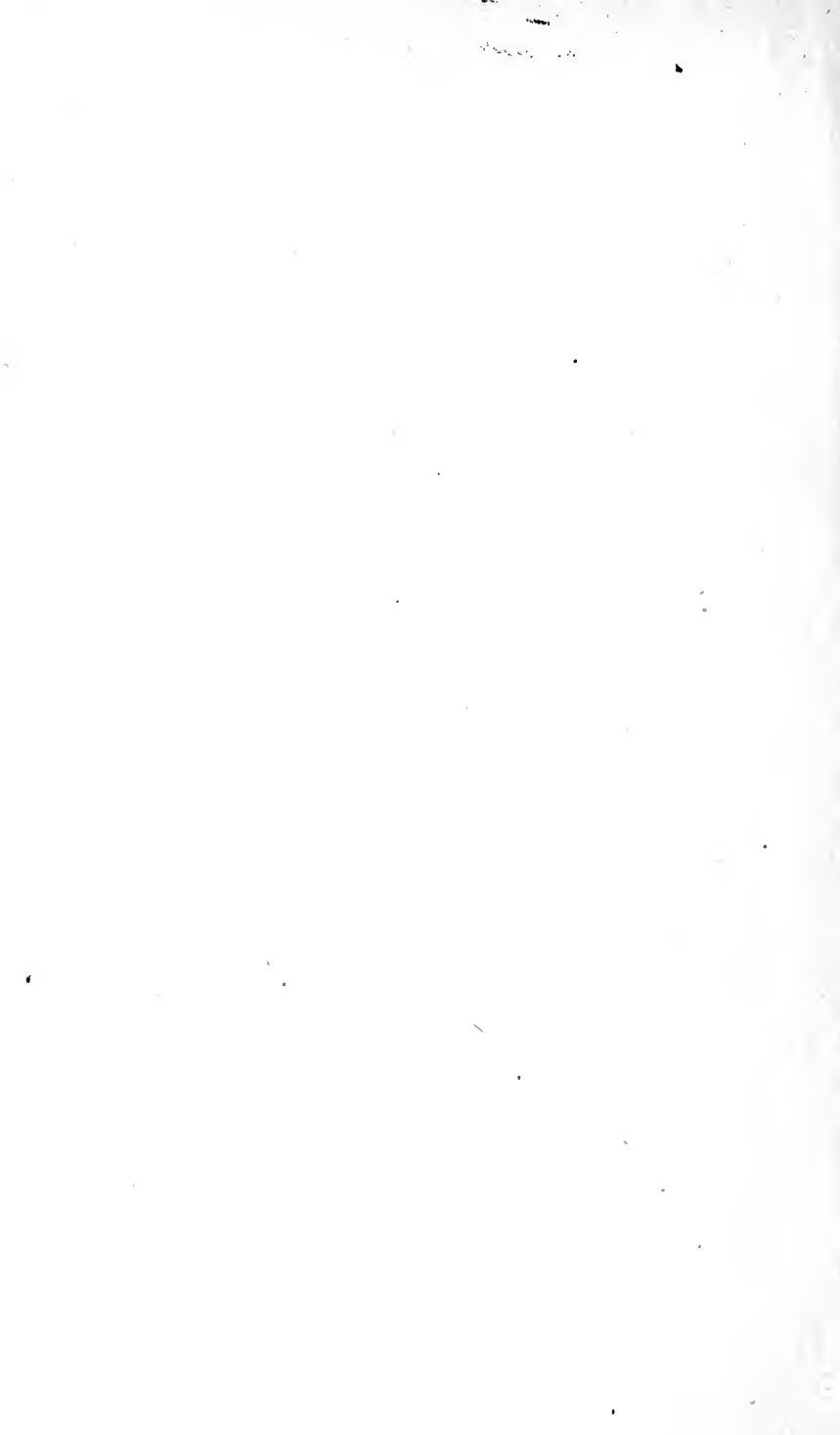
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STATEMENT BY VISCOUNT BRYCE*

NOTHING could be more shocking than this wholesale carrying away of men from Belgium. I know of no case in European history to surpass it. Not even in the Thirty Years' War were there such things done by any recognised government as the German Government has done, first and last, in Belgium. This last case is virtual slavery. The act is like that of those Arab slave-raiders in Africa who carried off negroes to the coast to sell. And the severity is the more odious because these Belgians and the work forcibly extracted from them are going to be used against their own people. Having invaded Belgium and murdered many hundreds, indeed even thousands, among them women and children who could not be accused of "sniping," the German military Government dislocated the industrial system of the community. They carried off all the raw materials of industry and most of the machinery in factories, and now, having thus deprived the inhabitants of work, the invaders are using this unemployment as a pretext for deporting them in very large numbers to places where nothing will be known of their

* Originally made in writing, in answer to a series of questions submitted to Viscount Bryce by the representative of the *New York Tribune* ; revised for publication here by Viscount Bryce himself.

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fate. They have not even been allowed to take leave of their wives and children. Many of them may never be heard of again. Women threw themselves on the rails in front of the locomotive about to haul out the train containing the miserable captives, and the German soldiers forced them off with bayonets. And von Bissing calls this "a humanitarian measure." Actually, it is all a part of the invasion policy. They defend it as being "war," as they justify everything, however inhuman, done because the military needs of Germany are alleged to call for it. It shows how hard pressed the military power is beginning to find itself at this latest stage of the war. It is said that Attila, when he was bringing his host of Huns out of Asia for his great assault on Western Europe, forced the conquered tribes into his army, and made them a part of his invasion. I can hardly think of a like case since then—except, indeed, when Frederick the Great, in one of his wars, forced captive soldiers, taken prisoner, into his army. In principle, it resembles the Turkish plan when they formed the Janissaries. The Turks used their Christian subjects, taken quite young and made Moslems, and enrolled them as soldiers (to fight against Christians) to fill their armies, of which they were the most efficient part. These Belgians are not, indeed, actually made to fight, but they are being forced to do the labour of war, some of them probably digging trenches, or making shells, or working in quarries to extract chalk to make cement for war purposes. The carrying off of young girls from Lille was terrible enough, and

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it seemed to us at the time that nothing could be worse. But the taking away of many thousands of the Belgian population from their homes to work against their own countrymen, with all the mental torture that a sudden and forced separation from one's family brings—this is the most shocking thing we have yet heard of. I have been shown in confidence the reports received from Belgium of what has happened there. The details given and the sources they come from satisfied me of their substantial truth. The very excuses the German authorities are putting forward admit the facts. In Belgian Luxemburg I hear that they have been trying to stop the existing employment in order to have an excuse for taking off the men.

When the early accounts of the atrocious conduct of the German Government in Belgium were laid before the Committee over which I presided, they seemed hardly credible. But when we sifted them, going carefully through every case, and rejecting all those that seemed doubtful, we found such a mass of concurrent testimony coming from different sources, and carefully tested by the lawyers who had examined the witnesses and taken their depositions, that we could not doubt that the facts which remained were beyond question. You* ask how German officers came to give such orders. The Committee tried to answer that question in a passage of their report. They point out that for the German officer-caste morality and right vanish and are

* This was originally written to the representative of the New York Tribune.

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no more when war begins. The German Chancellor admitted that they had done wrong in invading Belgium, but declared that they would go on and hack their way through. The German military class had brooded so long on war that their minds had become morbid. To Prussian officers war has become, when the interests of the State require it, a sort of sacred mission. Everything may be done by and for the omnipotent State. Pity and morality vanish, and are superseded by the new standard justifying every means that conduces to success. "This," said the Committee, "is a specifically military doctrine, the outcome of a theory held by a ruling caste who have brooded and thought, written and talked and dreamed about war until they have fallen under its obsession and been hypnotised by its spirit." You will find the doctrines I have summarised set forth in "*Kriegsbrauch im Landkriege*," the German Official Monograph on the usages of war on land, issued under the direction of the German Staff. What military needs suggest becomes lawful. You will find in that book a justification for everything the German Army has done, for seizing hostages, *i.e.*, innocent inhabitants of an invaded area, and shooting them if necessary. You will find what amounts to a justification even of assassination. The German soldiers' diaries captured on prisoners offer the proof that the German officers acted upon this principle. As the Committee said, "This is not the only case that history records in which a false theory, disguising itself as loyalty to a State or a Church,

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has perverted the conception of Duty, and become a source of danger to the world." These doctrines spread outside military circles. I do not venture to say that they infected anything like the whole people. I hope that they did not. But national pride and national vanity were enlisted, and it became a widespread system of doctrine accepted by the military, and even by many civilians. The Prussians are far more penetrated by the military spirit than the Americans or English or French, and such doctrines ministered to the greatness of the power of Prussia. It was part of Prussian military theory and sometimes even of practice a century ago. But in the rest of Germany it is a new thing. There was nothing of the kind in southern Germany when I knew it fifty years ago.

In an army there will be individual cases of horrible brutality, plunder, rape, ill-treatment of civilians. There will always be men of criminal instinct whose passion is loosed by the immunities of war conditions. Drunkenness, moreover, may turn a decent soldier into a wild beast. But most of the crimes committed in Belgium were not committed by drunken troops. The German peasant, the "Hans" whom we know, is a good, simple, kindly sort of fellow, as are the rural folk in every country. But in the Army he is merely the passive instrument of his officers. In that Army there is a habit of implicit obedience. The officers are extremely severe in military discipline. They will shoot readily for a minor infraction. It is the officers more than the

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private soldiers that are to blame. And some of the officers were shocked by what they were forced to do. "I am merely executing orders, and I should be punished if I did not execute them," said more than one officer whose words were recorded. But how can an officer in war time disobey the orders of the supreme military command? He would be shot, and if he were to say he could not remain in an army where he was expected to commit crimes, to retire in war time (if he were permitted to retire), would mean disgrace to his name. It is the spirit of the Higher German Army Command that is to blame. The authority that issued the orders is guilty. The German people, as a whole, are not cruel, but many of them have been infected by this war spirit.

And we little realise how strict is the German censorship. The voice of truth has been silenced. The German people have been fed with falsehoods. So far are they from believing in the record of their own army's cruelties, that they have been made to believe in cruelties alleged to have been committed by French and English troops. They have been fed on stories of soldiers with their eyes put out by Belgians. The Chancellor of the German Empire in a press communication said:—

"Belgian girls gouged out the eyes of the German wounded. Officials of Belgian cities have invited our officers to dinner and shot and killed them across the table. Contrary to all international law, the whole civilian population of Belgium was called out, and after having at first shown friendliness, carried on in

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the rear of our troops terrible warfare with concealed weapons. Belgian women cut the throats of soldiers whom they had quartered in their homes while they were sleeping."

There was no truth at all in these stories.

The diaries of German soldiers referred to have been published throughout the world, and no question has been raised of their authenticity. They contain testimony to outrages committed in Belgium and France that is overwhelming. No answer to them is possible. The German Government have never made an official reply to the Report of the British Committee, though I have heard of one or two newspaper articles and seen one unofficial pamphlet. None of these really attempted to deal with the British Report. They have attempted to answer some of the reports made by the Belgian Government. But their answer was really an admission of the facts, for it consisted chiefly in allegations that Belgian civilians had given provocation, and many of the worst cases were left unnoticed, not even provocation being alleged. They endeavoured to prove that Belgian civilians had shot at them. It would not have been strange if some civilians had shot at those who suddenly burst into their country, but no trustworthy proof has ever been given of more than a few of such cases, or of the stories of outrages committed by Belgian priests, women and children on German soldiers. Even if such occasional shooting by civilians had taken place, as very likely it did, that did not justify the wholesale

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slaughter of innocent persons and the burning of whole villages. In the burning of the twenty-six houses at Melle, which you tell me you* witnessed, no allegations were made of shooting by civilians. The little girl murdered at Alost, to whom you refer, had not shot at the Germans. The woman, eighty years old, had not shot at them. These severities were committed as a method to achieve an end. That end was to terrorise the civilian population, to break the courage and destroy the spiritual resources of the nation.

It is to be hoped and expected that the Allies will so completely defeat Germany as to discredit the whole military system and the ideas out of which the horrors of German war practice have developed. It is essential to inflict a defeat so decisive in the eyes of the German people as to dispose them to throw off the yoke of their military caste and repudiate its nefarious doctrines, and it is essential to discredit the methods themselves—discredit them by their failure—in so thorough a manner that no nation will ever use them again. The way, then, of ending what is called “Frightfulness” is by a victory over it. It is our task to show that shocking military practices and total disregard of right do not succeed. We must bring to pass the judgment of facts to the effect that such methods do not avail. In this determination our British people are unanimous as they have never been before. The invasion of Belgium, the atrocities committed there, and the sinking of the *Lusitania*—

* This was originally written to the representative of the New York *Tribune*.

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these three series of acts united the whole British people in its firm resolve to prosecute the war to a complete victory. Now, on the top of these things, and of isolated crimes of the German Government like the shooting of Miss Cavell and Captain Fryatt, come these abominable deportations of Belgians into a sort of slavery.

We know that our British soldiers fight hard, but they fight fair, and they have no personal hatred towards their enemies. I have been at the British front and have seen their spirit. I was told that our men when they take a prisoner often clap him on the back, and give him a cigarette. Efforts are very properly made here at home to keep hatred against the whole German people—among whom there are many who detest the conduct of their military caste just as much as we do—from the minds of our people, but it is right that we should all detest, and do our utmost to overthrow, the system and the spirit that have produced this war, and have made it so horrible. For that we must fight on with all our might. And in doing this we are fighting for the interests of neutral nations as well as for ourselves. We are fighting for Mankind.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARE FACTS.

On October 3rd, 1916, the German General Headquarters issued a decree that "Unemployed Belgians able to work may be compelled to work even outside the place where they are living. The German authorities and military courts have the right to enforce the proper execution of this regulation." The Belgian communal authorities were immediately called upon by the Germans to furnish lists of unemployed. When the communes refused, the Germans made out the lists themselves. In order to swell them they threw men out of employment by fraudulent means, and included men who had never ceased to be employed. When the lists were ready, the victims were called up at twenty-four hours' notice. Many were called upon, under pressure of imprisonment and starvation, to sign a "voluntary agreement." Those of means were in some cases invited to buy themselves off by paying blackmail. Otherwise, after being inspected like cattle by representatives of the German "Industrie-Bureau," or even by subordinate German officials, they were marched to the station, packed into open cattle-trucks (60 men in a truck), and carried away. The scenes of departure were heartrending. The Germans

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posted soldiers with fixed bayonets to control the desperate women and children whose husbands and fathers were being deported to Germany. The men showed a fine courage. As the trains moved out they sang Belgian national songs, and they dropped letters on their journey giving news of their condition and declaring their determination not to give in. The address given on one of these letters shows that already on their journey they were organised in semi-military units, with a "Company," "Battalion," and "Army Number." Of their treatment in Germany we know little, for hardly any news has come from them since. We only know that they are being deported there to take the place of German workers in German factories, mines, and quarries, in order that the Germans so released from necessary war-work at home may be drafted into the active German armies at the front. Fifteen thousand Belgians had been deported to Germany for this purpose by October 24th, 1916, 50,000 by November 19th, and nearly 100,000 by the beginning of December; but there are half-a-million unemployed in Belgium altogether, all of whom are exposed to deportation by the terms of the German decree, and as the Germans have already extended the measure—in practice, though not on paper—to Belgians who are not genuinely out of employment, every able-bodied worker in the Belgian territory under German occupation is a potential victim of the same outrage.

The decree of October 3rd applied to the "Region of the Dépôts," that is, the zone under martial law

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behind the German front. Bruges was raided first, and, from October 12th onwards, Alost, Termonde, Ghent, Courtrai. After October 24th the decree was extended to the provinces under the civil Governor-Generalship of Baron von Bissing at Brussels; deportations began in the provinces of Hainaut, Luxemburg, Antwerp, Brabant and Limburg, and have latterly been started in the province of Liège.

This systematic, wholesale deportation of a people has no precedent since the Assyrian deportations of the eighth century B.C. Its only parallel in contemporary history is the Turkish deportation of the Armenians in 1915—a crime committed, with Germany's implicit approval, by Germany's ally. But the scale of the present deportations in Belgium, though it is appalling already and no limit is in sight, is a less criminal feature than the steps by which the deportations were prepared and the object for which they are being carried out. There are half-a-million unemployed in Belgium to day because the German Government, as soon as it had got the country into its power, requisitioned the Belgian stocks of raw materials and carried away the plant from Belgian factories to Germany. This is what brought Belgian industry to a standstill and threw Belgian workmen out of employment; but the Belgian employers and Belgian communal authorities took such effective measures, between them, to provide relief, that the Belgian unemployed were maintained for over a year out of Belgian resources. This relief-work was stopped, not by any failure of Belgian organisation or

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resources, but by decrees of the German Governor-General, in which he took the right of giving work to the unemployed away from the Belgian communal authorities, and transferred it to the German military authorities in the occupied territory. The decree of October 3rd, 1916, flowed directly from these preparatory measures.

That this succession of events leading up to the deportations was not accidental, but was foreseen and designed by the German Government, is proved by the case of the occupied districts of Poland, where the same things have been done by the German Government in the same order, each step being taken here a few months before it was taken in Belgium. The object of this cold-blooded policy is as plain, and as wicked, as the means employed to carry it out. Belgian slavery is to make up for the shortage in German man-power. The labour of the Belgians, deported to Germany and coerced to do German work, is to help the German Army to keep Belgium under the yoke, and combat the Armies of Belgium and her Allies in their task of liberation.

CHAPTER II.

CARDINAL MERCIER'S INDICTMENT.

Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, has been the spokesman of Belgium under the German yoke ever since the German occupation began. The Germans have tried and failed to put him to silence, and now he has spoken again to denounce this last and most unpardonable German outrage against the Belgian nation. Cardinal Mercier's protest, which is dated November 7th, 1916, from his archbishopric of Malines, and is drawn up in the name of all the bishops of Belgium, sets out plainly what the Germans have done :—

“ Every day the military authorities deport thousands of inoffensive citizens from Belgium to Germany, and there condemn them to forced labour.

“ As early as the 19th of October we addressed a protest to the Governor-General, a copy of which was handed to the representatives of the Holy See, Spain, the United States and Holland, in Brussels ; the Governor-General, however, replied with a refusal to entertain our cause.

“ At the date of our protest, the decrees of the Occupying Power threatened only the unemployed ; but at present all able-bodied men are being carried off indiscriminately, packed into open trucks and sent away, we know not where, like a gang of slaves.

“ The enemy is taking the districts in turn. We had heard vague rumours of arrests having been made in the

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zone of the dépôts* at Tournai, at Ghent, and at Alost, but we did not know under what conditions. Between October 24 and November 2 raids were carried out in the district of Mons, Quiévrain, Saint Ghislain and Jemappes, from 800 to 1,200 men a day being seized. To-morrow, and on succeeding days, the blow is to fall upon the district of Nivelles. The following is a sample of the proclamations posted to announce the outrage :—

“ ‘ By order of the Kreischef, all persons of the male sex over 17 years of age are called upon to present themselves at the Place Saint Paul, at Nivelles, on November 8, 1916, at 8 o'clock (Belgian time), 9 o'clock (German time), bringing their identity cards, and, in case of necessity, their cards from the Meldeamt.

“ ‘ The only luggage allowed will be small hand baggage. Any person who fails to present himself will be forcibly deported to Germany, and will further be liable to a heavy fine and a long term of imprisonment.

“ ‘ Priests, doctors, lawyers and schoolmasters are not to present themselves.

“ ‘ Burgomasters will be held responsible for due execution of this order, which must be immediately brought to the knowledge of the inhabitants.’ ”

GENERAL VON BISSING'S APOLOGY.

The measures described in Cardinal Mercier's statement, and ordained in the official German proclamation which he quotes, are slavery in the literal sense of the word. The crime which the nineteenth century abolished in Africa and America has been revived in the twentieth century by Germany in Europe. The Germans do not deny what they are doing, any more than they denied the murder and arson which accom-

* The districts under Martial Law.

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panied their first invasion of Belgian soil. In this case, as in that, they admit their acts and justify them by necessity.

Baron von Bissing, the German Governor-General of Belgium since December, 1914, lays the responsibility for the deportations on Belgian idleness and the British Blockade. "England," he is reported to have said in his recent interview with the correspondent of the *New York Times*, "has reduced nearly 500,000 Belgian labourers to a chronic state of demoralising idleness. It is in order to remedy these increasingly intolerable conditions, harmful alike to the Belgian nation and the individual, that I have ordered measures to encourage the voluntary migration of unemployed Belgian labourers to Germany, and to *evacuate the congenitally idle* who refuse suitable work at good wages.

"Through the deprivation of raw materials all industrial plants (in Belgium) are condemned to idleness. . . . I did everything possible to revive Belgian industries, but because raw materials failed, it was impossible to bring Belgian factories to a height of production. . . . By trying to get Belgian industries into her own hand, England is deliberately striving to get Belgium in her power. . . ."

THE GERMAN APOLOGY EXPOSED.

Germany's accusations against her opponents in this war have often given the clue to misdemeanours which Germany was on the point of committing, or

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had already committed, herself. There has indeed been a famine of raw materials in Belgium, but Germany made it by seizing all the stocks that were in the country at the time of the invasion. Belgian factories have been paralysed, but Germany paralysed them by dismantling their machinery and carrying it away. The facts are recorded in the Thirteenth Report of the Belgian Commission on Violations of the Laws of War.* “Lists of the (German) requisitions read like veritable inventories, ranging from cases of matches, typewriters and children’s toys, to motor-cars, stocks of metal, large lots of cotton, wool, jute and every variety of colonial and foreign produce. All this was requisitioned, and a great part of it removed and sent to Germany, in October and November, 1914,† the prices to be fixed and payment made in Berlin . . . Thus ‘the re-establishment of normal economic conditions,’ of which we were given some hope, must be translated to mean absolute stagnation in all transactions; the gradual disappearance of our various stocks without payment; and the immobilisation under rigorous control of the balance left at Antwerp and successively encroached upon by fresh requisitions . . .”‡

* *Cp.* also the articles on the Deportations in the *London Times* of November 16 and November 21, 1916.

† Before any blockade was imposed on Germany by Great Britain.

‡ The monopoly of requisitioning materials in Belgium was invested in a German organisation called the “Zentralstelle.” In 1916, a neutral traveller in Turkey found quantities of Belgian rolling-stock in use on the Baghdad Railway (*London Times*, Sept. 8th, 1916, p. 7).

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This statement was made on March 18th, 1915, by the Acting President of the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce, when von Bissing had been Governor-General of Belgium for nearly four months, and "was doing everything possible to revive Belgian industries." The removal of machinery is described in a protest dated January 22nd, 1915, and addressed by the Federation of Belgian Builders to von Bissing himself :—

"In the midst of our persevering efforts towards the revival, desired by the German authorities, of civil activity in the regions under their rule, and the resumption of labours which would furnish the means of subsistence to the population, many of us have been crippled by a measure which we were far from expecting. Civilians, accompanied and assisted by military detachments, entered our factories and took possession of our plant.* Our machines were taken to pieces, and many of them were carried off and sent to Germany. In a great many cases no vouchers were given to the owners, stating the nature, number and value of the objects requisitioned."

And finally, such Belgian industry as survived these two paralysing methods of attack was check-mated by the imposition of prohibitive duties on the export of manufactured goods from Belgium to Holland—the only foreign market still open to Belgian trade.

* To the value of over 16,000,000 francs.

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BELGIAN UNEMPLOYMENT GERMANY'S POLICY.

This is how Germany, to apply von Bissing's phrase, "by trying to get Belgian industries into her own hand, deliberately strove to get Belgium in her power." How would that power make itself felt? The Federation of Belgian Builders prophesied, in January, 1915, that fatal course of events which von Bissing described so complacently in retrospect a year and ten months later.

"We will not now discuss the legality of these proceedings," the Protest continues, "though we should have no difficulty in showing to what an extent they contravene the international rules to which Germany affixed her signature.

"We prefer to confine ourselves exclusively to facts, and we therefore venture to ask Your Excellency if, as we had been led to hope, these requisitions are now at an end, and if it will be possible for us to alleviate their deplorable effects by a comparatively regular organisation of labour, since otherwise establishments which have been kept open hitherto, or were about to reopen, will be forced to turn out into the street a number of unfortunate workers to whom it will be impossible to give employment and wages.

"As Your Excellency must be well aware, the fate of thousands of workmen is at stake; they and their families, deprived of the means of subsistence, would soon be reduced to the direst extremities. We need not insist upon the manner in which such distress would react upon the whole country; it is sufficiently obvious.

"We cannot but feel convinced that the German authorities will hesitate to create such a situation. The charity of the public and the generosity of neutral

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countries, which has been exercised in the most touching manner on behalf of our people, would be powerless to avert it ; and these neutral countries would be driven to ask, like ourselves, whether even the interests of the Occupying Power should not combine with every sentiment of humanity and equity to forbid it to add new and unnecessary sufferings to all the horrors of war."

The present distress of the Belgian industrial population was thus foretold to von Bissing nearly two years ago, by an authoritative body of Belgian business men, as the inevitable consequence of the German policy for which he, as Governor-General, was responsible. But the contemporary German policy in Poland showed that there were even more sinister possibilities than this, for in Poland the Germans carried through their economic stratagem more rapidly than in the West to its final *dénouement*.

CHAPTER III.

DEPORTATIONS IN POLAND AND PLEDGES IN BELGIUM.

In Poland, as in Belgium, the Germans paralysed industry from the beginning of their occupation. They wrecked the machinery of the Dombrova mines. They carried off the plant and raw materials from the manufacturing districts. From Lodz alone over £5,000,000 worth of raw materials were requisitioned.* These acts, of course, produced widespread unemployment among the Polish industrial population, which the factory-owners and municipal authorities strained their resources to relieve. But the relief measures were deliberately impeded by the German authorities. By the autumn of 1915 "the German Press Censorship at Lodz was not allowing any plans of public works to be mentioned, and was suppressing advertisements for workmen inserted by the local factories which occasionally had a chance of working a few days."† At the same time numbers of official and semi-official German labour-bureaux were established in Poland, to induce the workmen, whose means of livelihood the German administration had cut off,

* "German Economic Policy in Poland" (articles republished by the Polish Information Committee from the London *Times* of Nov. 25, 26, 27, 1915), pp. 13-14.

† *Ibid.* p. 17.

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to emigrate to Germany and work in factories there. With no alternative before them but starvation, the Polish workmen yielded in considerable numbers, and it was calculated that by April, 1916, no less than 180,000 of them had migrated to Germany since the German occupation of Poland began.* The deportation of materials and machinery had been followed inexorably by the deportation of labour—the activity of the labour-bureaux under the screw of starvation was nothing short of this. This had happened in Poland, but the German Government is notoriously systematic. The pressure applied in one occupied country was not likely to be spared in another, and in Belgium the first stages of the process were already accomplished. Materials and machinery had been carried away, and German bureaux, like those in Poland, had already been brought to bear on Belgian labour.† From the first months of the German occupation, the workers of Belgium foresaw the ultimate peril that hung over them, and would have escaped from the country to put themselves beyond its reach, if they had not been falsely reassured by a series of authoritative German Pledges.

THE SEVEN GERMAN PLEDGES.

1. In a placard issued on the 2nd of September, 1914, Baron von der Goltz, then acting Governor-

* *Kurjer Poznanski*, April 9, 1916.

† Von Bissing, in his interview with the correspondent of the *New York Times*.

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General of Belgium, put an end to the first fears of the Belgian population. "I ask no one," he said, "to renounce his patriotic sentiments, but I expect from you all a reasonable submission and an absolute obedience to the orders of the Governor-General." This placard was posted in Brussels.

2. Some time afterwards, the Belgian refugees in Holland were invited to return to Belgium by the German authorities, who pledged themselves to restore in Belgium "normal conditions." They communicated this intention to the Dutch Legation in Brussels and also to the Dutch Consul-General, Van den Bergh, at Antwerp. As a consequence of this pledge numerous proclamations were posted by the Dutch authorities, exhorting the Belgians to return to their homes.

For instance, a proclamation by the Burgomaster of Hoorn, dated November 2nd, 1914, made the following communication :—

"The Burgomaster of Hoorn announces to the Belgians who have taken refuge here that the German authorities have communicated to the Dutch Legation in Brussels that they intend to urge the Belgian refugees to come back, in order that normal conditions may be restored in the occupied districts; and they have made the Legation a communication, the text of which is reproduced herewith :—

"Among the Belgian refugees in Holland it is rumoured that, once back in Belgium, the German authorities will not allow them to return to Holland in order to fetch their families. The Governor-General desires this rumour, which prevents the re-establishment

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of a normal situation, to be contradicted, and the refugees to be convinced that inquiries about their families are authorised.'

" Hoorn, November 2nd, 1914,

" The aforesaid Burgomaster,

" A. A. DE JONGH."

In Rotterdam, the following proclamation was posted on the walls :—

" THE BURGOMASTER OF ROTTERDAM TO THE BELGIAN REFUGEES.

"The Burgomaster of Rotterdam brings it to your notice that the negotiations between the Dutch Government and the German authorities concerning the return of the Belgian refugees have been brought to a happy conclusion. The return of refugees is allowed not only to Antwerp and the neighbourhood, but to all parts of Belgium. Exception is only made in the case of those who are members of the Belgian Army, who eventually will be arrested and sent to Germany. The Burgomaster therefore advises the refugees to return to their country, for it is to the interest of their country itself that life should resume its former course. The Burgomaster hopes that all inhabitants of Rotterdam who have given hospitality to refugees will assist him in this direction. He invites such inhabitants to advise their local police-stations as to whether their refugees are ready to go back. The trains are again running between Antwerp and Rosendaal, and food is plentiful at Antwerp.

" Rotterdam, October 27th, 1914,

" The Burgomaster,

" ZIMMERMAN."

3. On October 9th, 1914, General von Beseler, in command of the besieging army, made a declaration,

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during the negotiations for the capitulation of Antwerp, to the effect that "the disarmed Garde Civique would not be considered as prisoners of war."*

4. The same day, Lieutenant-General von Schütz, Commandant of the City, promised, in a proclamation, that "none of the inhabitants returning to their homes will be molested," and that "the members of the Garde Civique . . . can return in complete security."*

5. A few days afterwards Baron von Huene, Military Governor of Antwerp, pledged himself as follows to Cardinal Mercier: "Young men need have no fear of being carried off to Germany, either to be enrolled in the Army or to be subjected to forced labour."

This declaration was publicly read to the people in all the churches of Antwerp on October 18th, 1914.†

6. The pledge of Baron von Huene, limited to Antwerp, was afterwards ratified for the whole of Belgium, and without any time-limit, by Governor-General Baron von der Goltz himself, who went to Malines for the purpose and made the declaration

* See the Protest of the Deputies and Senators of Antwerp to von Bissing, in the Appendix to this pamphlet.

† See Cardinal Mercier's Protest, November 7th, 1916; Letter of Cardinal Mercier to von Bissing, October 19th, 1916; Letter of Cardinal Mercier to von Bissing, November 10th, 1916 (Printed in the Appendix to this pamphlet.)

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in the presence of two German staff officers and the private secretary of the Cardinal.*

7. On October 18th, 1914, the military authorities of Antwerp remitted a declaration, duly signed, to General van Terwisga, commanding the Dutch Army in the field, not only confirming the assurance that young people and the disarmed Garde Civique could return to Belgium and "need have no anxiety," but adding besides: "The rumour that these young people will be sent to Germany . . . is entirely without foundation."†

THE PLEDGES TO CARDINAL MERCIER.

The exact circumstances under which the pledges to Cardinal Mercier were given can best be described in his own words ‡ :—

"Two high authorities of the German Empire formally guaranteed the liberty of our compatriots to us. After the capitulation of Antwerp, the distracted population was asking what would happen to Belgians of military age, or to such as would reach that age before the occupation had ended. Baron von Huene, the Military Governor of Antwerp, authorised me to reassure the distressed parents in his name. However, as there were rumours in Antwerp that at Liège, Namur and Charleroi youths had been seized and forcibly carried off to Germany,

* See Protest of November 7th, 1916; Letter of Cardinal Mercier to von Bissing, October 19th, 1916. Letter of Cardinal Mercier to von Bissing, November 10th, 1916.

† See the Protest of the Deputies and Senators of Antwerp, in the Appendix to this pamphlet.

‡ Protest of November 7th, 1916.

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I begged Governor von Huene to be so good as to confirm in writing the oral assurances he had given me. He replied that the rumours of deportations were baseless, and gave me, without hesitation, the following written declaration, which was read aloud on Sunday, October 18th, 1914, in all the parish churches of the Province of Antwerp: 'Young men need have no fear of being carried off to Germany, either to be enrolled in the Army or to be subjected to forced labour.'

"Immediately after the arrival of Baron von der Goltz in the capacity of Governor-General at Brussels, I went to ask him to ratify the guarantees given by Governor von Huene to the Province of Antwerp, extending them to the whole country, without any time limit. The Governor-General retained my petition in order to consider it at his leisure. The following day he was good enough to come in person to Mechlin (Malines) to express his approval, and, in the presence of two aides-de-camp and of my private secretary, to confirm the promise that the liberty of Belgian citizens would be respected."

To this pledge von Bissing, von der Goltz's successor, was officially committed, and he implicitly endorsed it in a proclamation of July 25th, 1915, in which he declared that the Belgian population in the occupied territory "should never be compelled to do anything against the interests of their country." This series of pledges gave the Belgians a right to expect that in their case Germany would not push her economic strategy to its logical outcome—as she had done in the case of the Poles. But von Bissing's proclamation would have been more reassuring if he had not already violated the promise he was professing to endorse.

CHAPTER IV.

BELGIANS COERCED TO WORK FOR GERMANY.

Coercion had already been applied to Belgian workers by the German Administration to make them give their labour "against their country's interests." In April, 1915, at the Railway Works of Luttre,* the men had been offered a high rate of wages if they would take up their work again in the German service, and had been threatened, if they refused, with deportation to Germany. They did refuse, and no tactics could break their determination. They were imprisoned nine days in railway carriages and filthy cattle-trucks. Their dependents were seized as hostages. Uhlans were billeted on their houses and patrolled the streets. The shops-manager was arrested, imprisoned, led before the men, and ordered to influence them to give in. He told them that it was a question for their own consciences, and was sent back to prison with several others of the staff. A sham deportation—which went no further than Namur—failed to cajole them, and finally the actual threat was carried out. One hundred and ninety men were deported to Germany, and

* Belgian Commission, Reports xviii. and xix.

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sixty more were arrested on June 5th. Their treatment in their German prison camp will be described later on.

At other places pressure was brought to bear on the workmen through the communal authorities. At Malines the Burgomaster was compelled to furnish a list of 500 railwaymen—who were then arrested by soldiers and marched to the workshops under guard. When they refused to work, the whole population was punished by confinement indoors from 6.0 p.m. each evening, and von Bissing, in a proclamation dated May 30th, 1915, forbade anyone to enter or leave the town, and isolated it from all communication with the rest of Belgium. But the workmen still refused, and the Germans abandoned their efforts. It was the same on June 8th at the barbed-wire factory in Sweveghem-lez-Courtrai, where the Germans wished to use the output for their trenches on the Western Front. The 350 factory workers struck, and the Germans imprisoned the communal authorities. On June 10th the village was isolated by a cordon of troops. On the 11th the whole population was rounded up in the Town Hall, and the workmen were dragged to their benches. When they still refused, 61 were sent to prison, and five days later their wives were sent to join them. The Burgomaster was compelled to exhort them to return to work in a communal proclamation. But here, too, the workmen held out, and the Germans gave in, as they did at Malines, without proceeding to deportation. The same coercion was attempted

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throughout the country, notably at Ghent*, in the zone of Military Communications, where the following proclamation was posted in German, French, and Flemish, on June 10th, 1915 :—

“ By order of his Excellency the Inspector of the Depôt, I bring the following to the notice of the communes.

“ The attitude of certain factories which, under the pretext of patriotism and relying upon the Hague Convention, have refused to work for the German Army, proves that amongst the population there are tendencies aiming at the creation of difficulties for the officials of the German Army.

“ With regard to this matter, I hereby give notice that I shall repress, by every means in my power, such conspiracies, which can only disturb the good understanding existing up to the present moment between the said officials and the population.

“ I shall hold the communal authorities responsible in the first place for the increase of such tendencies, and I further give notice that the people themselves will be to blame if the liberty hitherto accorded them in the widest fashion has to be taken from them and replaced by restrictive measures rendered necessary by their own fault.

“ (Signed)

“ LIEUTENANT-GENERAL COUNT VON WESTARP,

“ *The Commander of the Depôt.*

“ Ghent, June 10th, 1915.”

THE PLOT AGAINST THE BELGIAN UNEMPLOYED.

When direct coercion failed, the Germans tried to attain the same end by letting the Belgians work freely and then commandeering their finished

* But also at Courtrai, Bruges, Jupille, Lixhe, Deynze, Roulers.

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products. They played this trick on a Belgian boot factory, but it aroused such a spirit of revolt among the workers that it proved no more practicable than the other policy.* Von Bissing gave up the attempt to exploit Belgian labour where it was still at work in national industry, and concentrated his coercion upon the unemployed. His fair-sounding proclamation of July 25th, 1915, that Belgian workers "should never be compelled to do anything against the interests of their country," merely marked the failure of one form of coercion and the resort to another. This time, taught by experience, he approached his object by degrees. The facts are told in Cardinal Mercier's Protest of November 7th, 1916 :—

"Three orders of the Governor-General's were designed to make ready for the blow that falls upon us to-day.

"On August 15, 1915, a first Order imposed forced labour on the unemployed, under penalty of imprisonment and fine ; but it declared that the labour in question was only to be applied to works on Belgian soil, and that any infringement would be tried in the Belgian Courts."

The Belgian communes responded to this first order in good faith and with great public spirit. They took on their own shoulders the social liabilities which the German invasion had created. In the Province of Luxemburg, for instance, the local Belgian authorities found employment for all the

* Statement by a neutral commercial agent in Belgium, London *Times*, Nov. 21, 1916 .

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unemployed on works of public utility. More than 20 miles of railway line were built, nearly 1,250,000 acres of marshy soil were drained, and plans were laid for the bringing under cultivation of 550 acres more. Over 3,000 acres were planted with timber, 3,000 manure pits were constructed, and water pipes were laid down. Unemployment was eliminated, and all this was done at a total charge to the provincial finances of fr. 1,790,000, of which not more than fr. 9,540 was expended in wages.

“Some chiefs of industry,” M. Cammaerts relates,* “who had kept their workshops open in order to provide some employment for their men during the crisis, had even been able to release them in order to allow them to earn higher wages (in relief work). These public works had been approved warmly by the German authorities. They were suddenly stopped in September under the avowed pretext of providing some workers for the strategic railways under construction in Belgium and for the German industries.”†

RELIEF WORK STOPPED BY ORDER.

The successful solution of the unemployment problem by the communes was indeed no part of

* *London Observer*, Nov. 19, 1916.

† Eleven workmen from the Commune of Forrières were called up before the German Military Court at Arlon and were sentenced to two, and in some cases three, months' imprisonment each for refusing to work on the railways for the German Administration. Four of these men were employed at the time on communal work.

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von Bissing's plan; it would have checkmated his policy at the first move. But in his recent interview with the *New York Times'* correspondent, when the matured fruits of his scheme had aroused the indignation of the civilised world, the avowed pretext of September, 1915, was tacitly passed over, and the policy reviewed in the light of the Belgian workers' moral good.

"Nothing is so demoralising to a man as long idleness, and nothing tends more to weaken a nation than when a large part of it is compelled for years to do nothing. I accordingly directed the Belgian communes to give employment to as many as possible on emergency public works, buildings, roads, sewers, etc. This, however, in time resulted in saddling a heavy uneconomic burden of debt on the communes for non-productive public works, the total debts of Belgian communes having been increased by Fr. 364,700,000*—mostly quite unproductive. I had to put on the brakes and limit this emergency work for the unemployed, ordering that in each case it be ascertained whether they were engaged in a necessary or useless occupation. Thereby the ranks of the unemployed were again increased. . . .

"The system of public support had thus had a demoralising effect on the labouring classes, who, moreover, by long idleness had impaired their skill and efficiency, which would prove detrimental to Belgian industry in future times of peace. Despite the lack of raw materials, we had, nevertheless, been able to reopen a number of Belgian factories with Belgian labour, and operate them in our interests. We had, for instance, 16,000 Belgians

* This alleged total, as well as the charge of unproductiveness, should be criticised in the light of the figures given above for the Province of Luxemburg.

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working for us in the wagon factories, whose output was useful for Belgium as well. But outside this there came to us an increasingly large longing and demand for more work from the unemployed. A part of them went voluntarily to Germany, where they had no difficulty in finding employment. Before I was compelled to adopt further measures, about 30,000 Belgians had voluntarily gone to Germany."

VON BISSING'S NEXT STEPS.

Thus the Governor-General's beneficent statesmanship in "putting the brakes" on communal relief was apparently working together with the activities of the German labour-bureaux for the moral and material good of the Belgian worker, the German Empire, and all other parties concerned. Von Bissing evidently indulged, at this stage, in the hope that the scheme would mature of itself without further administrative measures, and his disappointment was all the more bitter when "a great enemy propaganda against the voluntary beginning set in, working with every possible means, including the argument that Belgians who went to Germany to work were unpatriotic. This," he confided to his interviewer, "checked the voluntary flow." The labour-bureaux and the brakes upon the communes were not, after all, sufficient for their purpose, and von Bissing was driven to promulgate the ordinances of May, 1916. In his interview he only alludes to their scope in general terms, and for their

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exact contents we must quote again from Cardinal Mercier :—

“ A second Order, dated May 2, 1916, reserves to the German authorities the right of giving work to the unemployed, and threatens any person causing work to be executed without the sanction of the Governor-General with three years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 marks.

“ By virtue of this same Order, the jurisdiction which had been conceded to the Belgian Courts passes into the hands of the German authorities. A third Order, dated May 13, 1916, ‘authorises Governors, military commandants, and chiefs of districts (Kreischefs) to order the unemployed to be removed by force to the places where they are to work.’ Thus forced labour was already introduced, but it was in Belgium.

“ To-day it is no longer a question of forced labour in Belgium, but in Germany, and for the benefit of the Germans.”

These details are not to be found in von Bissing's interview, but, instead, the categorical declaration that, under his May ordinances, “every ground provided by international law is expressly recognised as good and sufficient reason for declining work. No labourer can therefore be compelled to participate in war enterprises, and all assertions that Belgian labourers have been compelled to work in war industries are untrue.” If this be so, we can only assume that von Bissing's intention in framing these ordinances was expressly to prevent the recurrence of what had happened the year before at Luttre, Malines, and Sweveghem, where there had been “compulsion for war enterprises” of the most

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flagrant kind. The fact remains that when von Bissing proceeded to put his ordinances into execution, the result was fresh "compulsion for war enterprises," and on a vastly extended scale.

CHAPTER V.

THE DECREE OF OCTOBER 3rd, 1916.

The final step was taken in October, 1916.

“A decree, dated from the German General Headquarters on October 3rd last, subjected to forced labour all able-bodied Belgians, who, either from unemployment or from any other reason, were dependent on others for their maintenance. The individuals to whom this decree applied might be obliged to work outside the locality where they resided, that is to say, deported into Germany in a state of semi-slavery.”*

The text of this decree is already notorious. It is headed :—“*Regulation concerning the restriction of the burdens on public charity and the removal of general unfavourable conditions,*” and reads as follows :—

“Art. 1. People able to work may be compelled to work even outside the place where they are living, if they apply for assistance or have assistance rendered to them and their dependents owing to gambling, drunkenness, idleness and voluntary or involuntary unemployment.

“Art. 2. Every inhabitant of the country is bound to render assistance in case of accidents or public danger, and also for the redress of public calamities within the measure of his capacity, even outside the place where he lives. In case of refusal he may be constrained thereto by force.

* Belgian Note to Neutral Powers, London *Times*, November 16, 1916.

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“ Art. 3. Anyone called upon to work under Articles 1 and 2 who refuses to work, or to continue at the work assigned him, will incur the penalty of imprisonment up to three years and of a fine up to 10,000 marks, or one or other of these penalties, unless a severer penalty is provided for by the laws in force.

“ Art. 4. The German authorities and the Military Courts have the right to enforce the proper execution of this regulation.

“GENERAL QUARTERMASTER VON SAUBERZWEIG.”*

“ This regulation is in force for the entire district occupied by the Fourth Army. It does not hold good for those persons who are able to work and voluntarily conclude a working contract according to the wage-regulation agreed upon, or who are already working in such a situation.

“ALBRECHT, DUKE OF WUERTEMBERG.”

CARDINAL MERCIER'S PROTEST.

This decree was followed up by a campaign in the German Press to show that the Belgian unemployed “ constituted a danger to public order and a burden on official benevolence.” The imputation was challenged by Cardinal Mercier in an open letter to von Bissing, on October 19th, from which the Cardinal quotes in his protest of November 7th, 1916 :—

“ ‘ You are well aware,’ we wrote, ‘ that public order is in no wise threatened, and that all influences, moral and

* The officer directly responsible for the execution of Edith Cavell. (Statement by Lord Robert Cecil in the House of Commons, November 21st, 1916.)

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civil, would support you spontaneously were it in danger. The unemployed are not a burden on official benevolence; it is not from your funds that they receive assistance.'

"In his reply, the Governor-General no longer urges these two first considerations, but he alleges that doles to the unemployed, from wherever they may come at present, must finally be a charge upon our finances, and that it is the duty of a good administrator to lighten such charges; he adds that 'prolonged unemployment would cause our workmen to lose their technical proficiency,' and that 'in the time of peace to come, they would be useless to industry.'"

The Cardinal had also reminded the Governor-General of the promise made by his predecessor, von der Goltz: "Belgian young men need have no fear of being carried off to Germany." This promise was given by von der Goltz for the whole of Belgium without any limit of time; but, when taxed with it in October, 1916, von der Goltz's successor put a novel construction on its terms.

"Governor-General von Bissing," states Cardinal Mercier, "replied to the reminder in my letter of October 19th, 1916:—

"'The employment of the Belgian unemployed in Germany, which has only been initiated after two years of war, differs essentially from the captivity of men fit for military service. Moreover, the measure is not related to the conduct of the war properly understood, but is determined by social and economic causes.'

"As if (comments Cardinal Mercier) the word of an honest man were terminable at the end of a year or two years like an officer's lease!

"As if the declaration confirmed in 1914 did not

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explicitly exclude both military operations and forced labour !

“ Finally, as if every Belgian workman who takes the place of a German workman did not enable the latter to fill a gap in the German Army ! ”

While Cardinal Mercier's protest was receiving this disingenuous response,* the deportations were being pressed forward apace. The decree of October 3rd, 1916, which only affected the Belgian provinces within the German Military Zone, was extended about three weeks later to the provinces under von Bissing's civil administration. The general procedure was as follows.

PRESSURE ON THE BELGIAN COMMUNES.

Immediately after the promulgation of the decree, the communal magistrates were required to furnish lists of the unemployed in their respective districts. When they refused, as they had the right to do, their offices and records were seized by the German authorities ; the magistrates were deposed, arrested or imprisoned, and the communes heavily fined.†

The following order was transmitted to Burgo-

* For Cardinal Mercier's final letter to Governor-General von Bissing, on November 10th, which closed the correspondence between them, see the Appendix to this pamphlet.

† *Times*, November 8, 1916. Before approaching the communes, the Germans had tried in vain to obtain the lists from the Belgian National Relief Committee.

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masters of Communes by the German Kommandantur at Florennes :—

“ TO THE BURGOMASTER.

“ By order of the General Kreischef at Givet, I again call it to your attention that you ought to know which of the men of your commune are unemployed and which receive relief. If you have not this information, you will order enquiries to be made by your *gardes champêtres*. If you do not observe this order, you will be arrested and transferred to Givet. The lists ought to be handed in before October 24th, 1916, noon, to the bureau of the Florennes Kommandantur.

“ October 23rd, 1916,

“ THE KOMMANDANTUR OF FLORENNES.”

“ At Bruges (one of the first communes proceeded against), the Burgomaster, an old man of eighty, who since the beginning of the occupation has given an example of noble patriotism, has been deposed for having refused to help the German military administration in its revolting task. The town was fined 400,000 marks (£20,000), and threatened with a further fine of 100,000 marks (£5,000) for each day's delay in the enrolment of the victims.”*

The town of Tournai, where the communal magistrates had returned a similar refusal,† had to pay 200,000 marks within six days and 20,000 marks for every day's delay. At Antwerp the magistrates'

* Belgian Government's Note to Neutral Powers.

† For the resolution of the Municipal Council of Tournai, and the rejoinder of the German “ Etappen-Kommandant,” see the Appendix to this pamphlet.

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refusal was answered by a military demonstration at the Town Hall and a perquisition.

“On Friday (November 17th), by order of General von Bissing, Governor-General of Belgium, the whole of the members of the Brussels City Council were arrested, and kept in detention for twenty-four hours. The ‘reason’ given by the German authorities for this outrage was that the city officials had refused to supply them with lists of the unemployed. In the interval, while the city councillors were ‘detained,’ German officials and soldiers, on order of the Governor-General, went to the city municipal offices and obtained possession of the lists of those men who, being without work, receive monetary relief. Of these there are unhappily a considerable number in Brussels. Many, however, are only on the lists temporarily, but it was realised that the Germans, paying no attention to this fact, would undoubtedly seize the opportunity to deport every man whose name appeared, even though he was only unemployed for a few days and had an early prospect of obtaining work. I am able to state that no deportations from Brussels had taken place up to Saturday morning, and that the stories published elsewhere of bloodshed having occurred are untrue. But the worst is feared in the Belgian capital, as inevitably the German seizure of the lists of the unemployed is a preliminary to their transport to Germany. Of the members of the municipality, whilst the councillors are free, each alderman, though not in custody, is still under German political police surveillance.”*

The officials of the Registration Office at Brussels were actually deported, but neither at Brussels nor elsewhere did the communal authorities give in.

* Despatch from Rotterdam in *Daily Telegraph*, November 12, 1916.

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“Nothing,” wrote the Burgomaster of Charleroi to the German Kreischef on November 3rd, “could lead me away from the strict observance of my oath, nor from the loyalty I owe my country in the safeguarding of her children.”

GERMAN FRAUD AND BLACKMAIL.

The Germans, baulked of the communal authorities' assistance, took the enrolment into their own hands. A proclamation made on November 12th, 1916, by General Hurt, Military Governor of Brussels and the Province of Brabant, contains the following announcement :—

“In cases where the Communes refuse to furnish the lists, the German Administration will itself designate the men to be deported to Germany. If errors are committed in this process of selection, the Burgomasters will have only themselves to blame, for the German Administration has neither the time nor the means to make enquiries concerning the personal status of each person. . . .

“I call attention to the fact that workmen, once deported to Germany, will not be allowed to return to Belgium except in cases of supreme need, or where it is justified by exceptional reasons.”

Thus the German Administration absolved itself beforehand from observing, not merely the rights of humanity, but the terms of its own decree, and the enrolment was actually conducted with glaring dishonesty.

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On November 11th information had reached Maastricht* that "the Germans were about to close all coal mines in the Campine, whereupon the 'unemployed' workmen would be taken to Germany." This has since been confirmed. The collieries in question were the "André Dumont" and the "Winterslag." The Germans first tried to extort from the miners a signed declaration pledging them to work in Germany. When the miners refused to sign this "voluntary" contract, the mines were closed down, that they might be deported forcibly as "unemployed." The same action was taken against the Van de Kerkhove Factory at Ghent.

M. Cammaerts reports a more ingenious device. "The Germans published an order according to which no worker might seek employment outside his district. As most of them live in scattered villages, and have always to travel a few miles to reach their workshop, they were consequently thrown out of employment and exposed to deportation."† The Belgian Government, too,‡ "has heard from a reliable source that employed men have been taken away and others deliberately thrown out of employment so that an excuse might be made to requisition their labour."

The Germans have also juggled with the definition of what unemployment is. At Nivelles, for instance,

* *Les Nouvelles* of Maastricht, November 11, 1916.

† *Observer*, November 19, 1916.

‡ Note to Neutral Powers.

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after the first 1,700 men had been drafted off, a fresh proclamation warned those still left to accept work from the German "Industrie-Bureau," "since those found without *sufficient* employment will have to answer the next call." The German military authorities have announced a ruling that "men not working regularly four days in the week are to be regarded as unemployed"; and in accordance with this, the Commander of a battalion of the Second Landsturm Infantry Regiment of Hamburg gave warning at St. Ghislain, in a proclamation dated October 30th, 1916, of the forthcoming deportation of "men totally or *partially* unemployed."

Often, however, men in normal employment were herded into the gangs of deportees without any pretence that they came within the terms of the decree. Cardinal Mercier witnesses that—

"Though the unemployed are certainly enrolled, a very large number of those recruited—one-fourth in the district of Mons—are men who have never been out of work, men of a great variety of callings: butchers, bakers, master tailors, brewers' assistants, electricians and agriculturalists; even quite young lads have been taken, students at university colleges or other higher schools."

The Germans have deported small agricultural landowners and agricultural labourers from Luxemburg. They have deported domestic servants, gardeners of country houses and housekeepers from the province of Hainaut. Among the men sent away from the Southern Station of Antwerp were six

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priests, a vicar, many teachers, and students. At Ghent, on October 13th, the men imprisoned in the factory "La Gantoise," and ready to be deported, included clerks, petits bourgeois, shopkeepers, and workmen still employed in factories. At Nivelles no discrimination was made between employed and unemployed. Out of a total of about 1,700 deportees, hardly 550 were registered on the lists of the National Relief Committee as unemployed. The employed men thus deported were mostly farmers, masters of workshops ("patrons"), and skilled labourers. Among the 800 to 900 deportees from Braine l'Alleud, the employed were more numerous than the unemployed. At Mons, clerks, students, and small agricultural labourers were among the men arrested for deportation. On November 22nd, in the district of Gembloux, very few unemployed were deported; most of the men were young men and skilled workers up to the age of 52. At Gembloux itself, out of 235 deportees, there were only 2 unemployed. In the Gembloux district the Germans deported two chiefs of the Relief Committee of Sauvenière, bearers of cards of the C.R.B.; Léon Charlier, agricultural labourer; Joseph Minique; M. Constant Doyen, of the C.R.B.; Constant Massart of the C.R.B.; and René Chaussée, surveyor in chief of the Society for Protection of the "Enfants Martyrs." Adelin Deprez, wainwright; Renson (same profession); Maurice Dricot, a medical student, and many agricultural labourers were also deported.

Perhaps the worst infamy of the enrolment was

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the blackmail extorted from well-to-do persons who had been kidnapped among the rest. The *Telegraaf*, of Amsterdam, published on November 20th the following information from the Belgian frontier :—

“Many civilians are allowed by the Germans to buy themselves off from slavery. Several times it had been noted that some of the deported persons returned, and the reason was not understood. Now, however, we are able to give examples of the existence of a scandalous system of blackmail. Recently, at Klinge, many civilians, not only unemployed receiving public charity but also some well-to-do citizens, were assembled by the Germans in a schoolroom. The following day it was announced that those who paid a thousand marks would be set free. Some of them paid the amount demanded. Perhaps the result was not sufficient, for afterwards the sum was reduced to 500 marks. Of course, most of them were unable to pay this amount, while others refused to take this advantage over their poorer companions. Afterwards the men were marched to the station, where a train of goods trucks was ready. Into these trucks, the floors of which were covered with straw, the men were pushed, and as soon as one was filled the door was locked. The others were loaded in the same way. Those outside afterwards heard men in the locked trains singing the national song: ‘They shall not tame him, the proud Flemish Lion.’ From St. Nicholas hundreds of civilians have been taken away. In towns and villages men are carried away in the night, often without the members of their family knowing they have left.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROUNDING-UP AT MONS.

The actual seizure of the victims and their despatch to Germany by train was a heartrending process from beginning to end. We have a particularly full and trustworthy account of how it was conducted in the district of Mons :—

“The authorities have instituted a system of recruiting which appears to have been applied on a large scale in the district of Mons—a district which, it is to be noted, is not included in the so-called Etappen-Zone (Zone of Military Depôts under martial law).

“The proceedings began on Thursday, October 26th. An order was posted up the preceding day in the villages of Quiévrain, Thulin, Elouges, Baisieux, Hansies and Montroeuil-sur-Haine, summoning the entire male population above the age of 17 to present themselves at Quiévrain on the morning of October 26th at 8 o'clock.

“The men assembled were brought into the courtyard of a school, where they remained for a long period in the rain. Most of them had come unprovided with warm clothing or food, unprepared for the length of the proceedings and ignorant of their meaning.

“After a preliminary inspection, the authorities singled out the priests, the professors and teachers, the town clerks, the customs officials and the members of the local food committees.

“Old men and cripples were at once rejected.

“The authorities then proceeded to select the men

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whom they proposed to take ; the selection was made with great care, though the principle upon which it was based is not apparent ; in some cases men out of work were sent back home, while others who had never been unemployed, as well as clerks, students and farmers, were taken. 1,200 persons were retained, about 20 to 25 per cent. of the able-bodied population of these villages.

“ These men were divided into various groups and sent to the railway station, where a train had been waiting since the morning ; the train departed in the direction of Mons ; nothing further is known of what happened to these unfortunate victims. Relatives who, in great distress, had followed the train as far as Mons, bringing clothes and food for the men, were not allowed access to them. It is probable that the men were sent to Germany.

“ Similar measures have been taken in other places. On Saturday, October 28th, the men in the district of St. Ghislain were called up. In some cases the German authorities forced the men to sign a contract for six months ; this contract stated the rate of wages and cost of lodging, and guaranteed free transport on the outward journey only. These agreements were obtained under pressure. Two sons of a farmer from the village of Audregnies showed me their contracts, in accordance with which they were to present themselves at the railway station at Quiévrain on November 3rd. They were warned that if they refused to sign they would be imprisoned and given nothing but beetroots and similar food. It is probable that many men were obtained under similar conditions, but all those who left had no doubt refused to sign.

“ Many trains were seen passing through the station at Mons going to France, packed with civilians from Flanders. They were herded together in cattle trucks, insufficiently clothed and without any knowledge of their destination.

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Certain cases of brutality were pointed out, and it is certain that these unfortunate men were harshly treated.

“One of the trains full of Flemish people stopped for a whole night at Frameries; men employed in a neighbouring factory heard their cries of distress. They complained of hunger and cold. The workmen brought them what food they had but were not allowed access to the men, and one of them who left the train to pick up a piece of bread was brutally treated by the Germans.

“The whole population in the district of Mons has been deeply affected by these events.”

This was how the victims were rounded up at Mons, but the procedure was not everywhere the same. At Bruges (one of the first communes attacked) only a definite number of men were demanded. At Mons, as we have seen, they summoned all males of military age, and at Antwerp they did the same. At Nivelles and other places they called up the whole male population without any age-limit at all. At Forrières, again, they made a special call for railwaymen.*

There were also differences in the process of selection. Von Bissing declares in his interview that “strict orders have gone out from me to go painstakingly about the work of selecting the men to be transported to Germany from the special lists that have been drawn up. Each case is investigated in the presence of the local Burgomaster, who is required to be present and to give information regarding each case. In addition, a local doctor and a member of

* For a full account, by an eye-witness, of the deportation at Wavre, see the sixth document in the Appendix.

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the (German) Civil Government have also to be present to investigate each case and select those to be evacuated." This is a highly-coloured version of what happened. In some places, like Antwerp, the investigation was conducted by representatives of the German Industrie-Bureau, who looked the men over like cattle and carefully discriminated between individuals. But often it was carried out quite superficially by German officers or gendarmes. When the Burgomaster was allowed to be present (and this was not always actually the case), no attention was paid to his representations, and the men were arbitrarily sorted—for deportation "to the left," for exemption "to the right."

"VOLUNTARY AGREEMENTS."

But those selected for deportation were not always sent to Germany at once. The German authorities well knew the indignation they would arouse by carrying Belgian workmen away into captivity, and were resolved to make them travel to their destination as "voluntary emigrants," warranted to be searching of their own free will for work. They had tried to extort "voluntary contracts" from the Belgians in the spring of 1915; they had tried it again at Ghent and in the Campine within the previous few days, before they had resorted to the alternative of closing down the factories and mines, and bringing the recalcitrant workmen, as *ex post facto* "unemployed," within the terms of the Depor-

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tation Decree. And now, at this eleventh hour, they put the same pressure on men already marked down for deportation by force. They imagined that these men, with no alternative before them and nothing to save by refusal but their honour, would yield at last, and sign away their liberty to save Germany's face.

At Antwerp, for instance, a decree signed by General Freiherr von Huene was posted on November 2nd, announcing that men selected for deportation "are to be concentrated at the Southern Station, whence they will be conveyed in groups to workshops in Germany. At the concentration camp," continues the decree, "representatives of the German Industrie-Bureau will be present, and will offer voluntary agreements to be signed. Those who refuse to sign an agreement will immediately be deported to Germany." The decree adds that "the destination will be some place in Germany where the workmen will be distributed among the German factories, and there they will have to work."

The inducement to go as a volunteer and not as a slave is indicated in a clause to the effect that "those who refuse to sign the agreement and are deported against their will, will also receive no more than 30 pfennigs ($3\frac{1}{4}$ d.) a day."

When met with a refusal, however, the Germans did not always give up their attempt at once. At Ghent, the deportees who refused to sign were imprisoned in the "la Gantoise" factory building

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and subjected to every possible kind of pressure. They were starved, overcrowded, and only allowed an hour's exercise a day. Their signatures were extorted after two or three days of this treatment.

Another instance is recorded by the neutral witness whose evidence is given in the *London Times* of November 21st. "They were offered work in the mines and quarries of Westphalia and the North of France; and some, forced by circumstances, were willing to go. I am informed that, on reaching the camp of Holzminden, to which some of them were sent, they were offered extra pay if they would, 'of their own free will,' go into the munition works at Duisburg. This despicable trick was only partly successful; but many who at first patriotically scorned the bribe were maltreated by their military guard, and yielded, fearing a worse fate. One man who escaped, and succeeded in getting across the Dutch frontier, has told the shameful story."

All these whose resistance was broken contributed, no doubt, towards von Bissing's total of "thirty thousand Belgians who had voluntarily gone to Germany, where they received treatment identical with that of the German workmen and wages such as were never before earned by them in Belgium."

Some of the Belgian workmen who were confronted with this monstrous alternative of forcible deportation or "voluntary agreement," attempted to escape from it by crossing the Dutch frontier. A few of these made their way over the electrified

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wire-fence ; others were electrocuted or shot down by the German patrols. In order, it seems, to close the last possible loophole of escape, the Belgian Customs officials at Putte-Capelle, on the frontier north of Antwerp, who had hitherto been allowed by the Germans to continue their functions, were removed from their posts, and German soldiers were sent in their place.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS' NOTICE.

Meanwhile, those on the selected lists whose "voluntary signatures" the German authorities did not consider it worth while to obtain, were deported without respite. Cardinal Mercier mentions in the protest of November 7th that the interval between the posting of the placard and the actual deportation was usually twenty-four hours. The time was ample for preparing the scanty outfit which the Germans permitted the exiles to provide at their own expense. For parting, possibly for ever, from their families, it was equivalent to receiving no notice at all, but the German Administration does not take such "subjective" considerations into account.

Here is the text of the summons to the men selected for deportation in the Commune of Alost:—*

' Mobil. Etapp.-Kommatr. E.O. 13/14 October, 1916.
9. xviii. No. —————

" COMMUNE OF ALOST.

" On the 16th October, 1916, M—— X—— must

* In this case three days' notice seems to have been given.

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present himself at 8.0 a.m. at Alost (at the Ecole de Pupilles), provided with :—

1 scarf.	1 overcoat.
1 neckerchief.	1 pair of cloth gloves.
1 waistcoat.	1 waterproof (capable of serving as a waterproof coat).
1 pair of trousers.	1 towel.
1 pair of shoes or boots.	1 food-bowl.
2 shirts.	1 spoon, knife and fork.
2 pair of socks.	2 blankets.
2 pair of drawers.	

“ He may also provide himself with money.

“ Failure to appear will be punished with imprisonment and deprivation of liberty up to a term of three years, and with a fine up to 10,000 marks, or with one or other of these penalties.

“ THE KOMMANDANTUR.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENTRAINMENT OF THE VICTIMS.

When the twenty-four hours expired, the men on whom the notice had been served were marched to the railway-station and herded into the train. Cardinal Mercier gives a general description of these terrible scenes of parting :—

“Bands of soldiers break into their peaceful homes, snatch youths from their parents, the husband from his wife, the father from his children, guard with fixed bayonets the doors through which wives and mothers attempt to pass to bid a last farewell to those who are leaving them ; marshal their captives in groups of forty or fifty, and hoist them forcibly into open trucks ; the engine stands ready under full steam ; as soon as the train is full a superior officer gives the signal for departure. Here we have another thousand Belgians reduced to slavery ; condemned, without previous trial, to the severest penalty in the penal code save the death penalty—deportation. They know not where they are going, nor for how long. All they know is that their work will benefit no one but their enemies. From some of them, by bribes or threats, an agreement has been extorted which is shamelessly called ‘voluntary.’”

The neutral witness quoted in the *London Times* of November 21st describes the entrainment at Antwerp :—

“The scene in the Avenue de Keyser was heartrending,” he says. “The men were gathered in groups of

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sixty under military escort, and the soldiers brutally beat back their families and friends who wished to bid them a final farewell. I was told that machine-guns were placed in front of the station in case the crowd became too demonstrative. The men were sent off in cattle trucks. No doubt you have seen the trucks of foreign railways labelled 'to hold eight horses or forty men.' Sixty were closely packed into one of these, so you can imagine their condition on reaching their unknown destination. They were not all of the labourer class. Some appeared to be clerks or students, and I saw several priests."

The most terrible description of all has been given by an American eye-witness to the London correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News* :—

"Naturally, the scenes attending this forcible removal of fathers and sons wring the hardest of hearts. I saw one long train of cattle trucks loaded with prospective deportees. Many had resisted, only to feel a German bayonet. Women and children had fought for their menfolk with desperate fierceness ; clothes were tattered, eyes streaming, voices screaming and shouting until they were hoarse. Generally with as little brutality as possible, but always effectually, the Kaiser's soldiers crushed all opposition. Houses were searched by armed men from cellar to roofs. No discrimination was made between employed and unemployed. Only one object was plainly in view—to obtain the largest possible number of strong hands. When the train was loaded women and children were standing about in a huge crowd. Suddenly they ran on the line in front of the locomotive, threw themselves on the rails, and clung there, shutting their eyes and uttering loud lamentations. Detachments of soldiers prised them loose with bayonets and forced them to clear

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the track, when the train moved off towards the German frontier."

BELGIAN COURAGE.

Between the lines of bayonets the Belgian exiles parted from their wives and children. "Whole trainloads of these miserable people," states the Belgian Government, "have been going towards Germany. Others have been sent to the invaded departments of France. The men, crowded in open trucks, exposed to wind and weather, were in a most miserable condition. But their *morale*, in spite of cold and privation, was not shaken, and they went away singing patriotic songs."*

"The Germans continue the deportation of Belgian citizens," states a message from Amsterdam, "especially of railwaymen, of whom there are still about 65,000 in Belgium. Five trains, consisting of thirty or forty carriages, pass through the frontier station at Welkenraedt each day. All classes are deported, including lawyers, clergymen, teachers, peasants, and labourers, and as the trains pass on their way they throw notes bearing the words 'Deported to Germany,' 'Greetings to wife and children,' 'Am hungry,' &c."†

One of these messages is reported in full:—‡

"The young men of X and the surrounding villages have been captured.

"The unmarried comrades of Y from the villages of Z, from 18 to 30 years of age, are here together. We will

* Cp. *Times*, November 8 ; *Observer*, November 19.

† *Times*, November 17.

‡ *Times*, November 8.

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never work for the Germans, and never sign their paper. Long live King Albert !

“ Van T. and De R. from X were sent on October 19th to Germany, and arrived on October 20th.

“ If this note is found, please send it home to X.”

GERMAN MISREPRESENTATIONS.

These few words on scattered fragments of paper are the last that has been heard of the Belgian exiles since they were carried away. They are more convincing than the complacent accounts of their condition vouchsafed by the German Administration and the German Press.

“ They bowed to the inevitable and went off to Germany with a certain cheerfulness,” von Bissing informed the representative of the *New York Times*. (Doubtless he inferred their cheerfulness from their singing.) “ The process of evacuation is being carried out as gently as possible, and every attempt is made to avoid all injustice. . . . During the transport they receive good food. . . .”

The Governor-General is echoed in the semi-official communications to the German Press (independent comment has been disallowed) :—

“ The removal of the Belgian unemployed to Germany has, we learn, pursued its course with all tranquillity and orderliness. . . .

“ The workmen behave quite sensibly. . . .

“ The good food given them on the journey has also not failed to influence the temper of the workmen. . . .

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“The Belgians themselves will gradually realise the utility of these regulations, which put an end to abuses that were bound to become more and more oppressive for many Belgians. . . .”

THE REAL FATE OF THE EXILES.

That is what the Germans say ; and as they can, and do, withhold all information as to the fate of the exiles when they cross the German frontier, we can only catch glimpses of the truth. These glimpses are not reassuring. There is the precedent, for instance, of what happened to the Poles who were carried off to Germany in 1915. Then, as now, German newspapers painted the brightest pictures of the exiles' condition ;* and then, as now, other evidence leaked out. “The last chapter in the story of ‘The Polish Workmen in Germany’ can be found in any issue of the German Official Gazette for the General-Government of Warsaw. Practically in every number whole pages are covered with military warrants for the apprehension of the ‘perfectly contented’ Polish workmen who, without permission, have left their places of employment.”

We know, too, what happened to the Belgian railwaymen from Luttre who were deported to Germany in June, 1915, sixteen months before the general deportation was started. The facts are given in the Nineteenth Report of the Belgian Commission on the Violation of the Laws and Customs of War :—

“During the journey from Luttre to the internment

* “Poland Under the Germans,” pp. 24, 29.

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camp at Senne (Westphalia), they received only an inadequate supply of food and drink. They spent the night in the cellars of Cologne Railway Station, packed in so tightly that they could not lie down to sleep.

"On arrival at the camp, all the workmen were marked by the letter Z sewn on their clothes.

"Workmen in class (b) were subjected to the same treatment as ordinary criminals—notably their heads were shaved.

"The tasks the prisoners were set to do were extremely hard, especially for men accustomed to the hammer, file and graver. They consisted of clearing the wood or digging trenches for draining the water, and placing pipes in position. The distance from the camp to their place of work varied from 5 to 10 kilometres (3 to 6½ miles), that is, 10 to 20 kilometres for the double journey, so that the fatigue of a long tramp was added to that of severe labour.

"Though the land to be cleared and drained consisted of moving sand, the Germans stopped any of the elementary precautions necessary in such circumstances, such as shoring up. They obviously intended that the work should be as severe, dangerous and unhealthy as possible. On several occasions the workmen were nearly crushed by falling trees or buried by landslides in the trenches, which were sometimes 3 to 4 metres (10 to 13 feet) deep. The trenches were often flooded with almost freezing spring water, in which the workmen had to stand with bare feet while at work.

"The sentries stopped all rest. If a workman, tired out, straightened his back for a moment's relief, he was hit with a stick or the butt end of a rifle, and even pricked with a bayonet.

"The food generally was insufficient, bad and unhealthy.

"Sometimes the workmen became ill while at work, owing to insufficient food. The sentries merely moved

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them on one side, exposed to the rain or sun. The French and English soldier prisoners, whose camp was only separated from that of the workmen by a road, used out of pity to throw them a share of the food they received from their families.

“The men slept on bare boards ; some had bedclothes, others had not.

“The least fault or the slightest breach of regulations was severely dealt with. The punishments were various, but all cruel. A workman who had not gone to the showerbath at the same time as the others, was placed on the tarred roof of a shed for several hours barefooted and with his face exposed to the sun. Another punishment was to make the victim run for several hours with a bag of bricks over his shoulders, or with a brick in each hand and two fastened on each side of his coat. Every two hours the wretched man was allowed a five or six minutes’ halt and a drink of water. Sometimes this was varied by making them cross and recross with the same load a stream with very steep banks. Sometimes also the victim was tied to a post or tree and exposed to the sun for several hours.

“Four workmen became seriously ill and remain under treatment at the camp hospital. Several others have fallen ill since their return.”

This was the German method of exacting task-work from 250 Belgian workmen. It is the measure of what they will do, and doubtless are already doing, to the tens of thousands who are being deported now.

Here is a message that one of them succeeded in sending home after he had arrived in Germany and his task-work had begun :—

“DEAR PARENTS,

“Many compliments to all and to Amelia. We

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are here in a large factory, and there are many poor people from C——. Keep up your spirits, all, as we do here. We sing night and day. A handshake to all. Good-bye.”

We learn something more from an official proclamation (No. 1691) by the German Etappen-Kommandant of Antoining, dated October 20th, 1916. The Kommandant presses the Commune to compile a list of working men *and women* between 17 and 46 years of age, liable to be taken for forced labour. The forced labour, he states, “may consist of work in factories, sawmills, workshops, on the land, or on the construction of roads. He pledges himself that the population “will never be forced to work in places exposed to *continuous* enemy fire.” But if the deportees refuse to work, “they will be incorporated in battalions of civil workers condemned to disciplinary work with reduced nourishment.”

This was not an idle threat, for these punishment battalions are actually in being. We know this from a message thrown out of a train by a Belgian deportee, in which he gives his military classification* :—

“ VALENTIN PEETERS,

“ 2 Komp(agnie),

“ Ziv(ilisten) Arb(eiter) Bat(aillon) 19.

“ Et. Indp. Armée No. 846,b.”

* The name and numbers have of course been represented here by substitutes, in order to conceal the individual's identity and shield him from reprisals.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCALE OF THE CRIME.

How will it end? That is the urgent question. Week by week, since October 3rd, 1916, the number of the deported has steadily increased. Fifteen thousand was the estimate for the first levy in Flanders, given in the Belgian Note, and also in the *Times* of November 8th. "The raiding," writes the *Times* on this date, "has gone on throughout the whole Military Zone, and particularly at Bruges, Ghent, Courtrai, Alost, and Tournai. The whole able-bodied male population, rich and poor, employed or not, has been affected."

The same figure was given by the neutral witness reported in the *Times* of November 21st :—

"According to an official estimate, 15,000 have been deported from Flanders; 1,000 were taken from Alost; while Ghent, Namur, Tournai, Malines, Oudenarde, Huy, and other towns have been ransacked for men. I myself saw 2,000 men sent off from the Central Station at Antwerp on November 8th, and I was told that an equal number had been despatched from the Southern Station on the previous day."

The total levy in Antwerp during the first week in November is given in the *Nieuwe Courant*, of Amsterdam, on November 10th :—

"Many Belgians have arrived at Ossendrecht during

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the last few days, who have made their escape from Belgium to escape deportation. Not only the unemployed are being taken away, but those in work as well. Even clergymen have been taken to work on a new railway line from Lille to Liège. Last week no less than 21,000 men were deported from Antwerp. On November 6th the men of Eeken were taken away, the next day those of Zandvliet and Stabroek, and so on."

Later, and higher, figures were communicated by the American eye-witness to the London correspondent of the Chicago *Daily News* :—

"Already," he states, "between 30,000 and 40,000 men have been torn from their homes, forced into cattle-trucks, and conveyed to Germany. In Germany they will be compelled to choose between aiding the Central Powers in the war and suffering penalties of the severest nature. Many of them, beyond doubt, will refuse to work, regarding such labour as treason to their own country, and thus will land themselves in straits too harrowing to think about. Unless Germany can be induced to abandon her present policy, between 200,000 and 300,000 Belgians will be deported. The American Relief Commission has thrown around 100,000 Belgians the protection of certificates of employment on relief work, but this number is a small part of the total population that is subject to impressment."

The latest accounts of all place the number already deported at 100,000, and the "total subject to impressment" is an elastic figure. It is not sufficient to estimate the total affected by the terms of the German decree, because the Germans, as we have seen, have not even adhered to their own provisions, but have used them as a

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cloak for kidnapping any and every Belgian they wished, whatever his status or present condition. There is no other limit than the German demand for Belgian men to take the place of German men in the mines and factories and fields of Germany, that the Germans so released may recruit the depleted ranks at the front. And obviously this limit will constantly expand with the duration of the war and the increasing exhaustion of German man-power. "Nearly five hundred thousand Belgian labourers," von Bissing states in almost the first sentence of his interview, "have been reduced—by England (he has to say)—to a chronic state of demoralising idleness." This five hundred thousand is the provisional limit of the Belgian slave-labour that Germany intends to kidnap and exploit. But the final limit will not be reached until Germany has enslaved the total human energy in Belgium that is suitable to her purposes or that can be made to yield profit by coercive means.* Germany is ruthlessly destroying her own human resources, and she is determined to take at least as heavy a toll from the conquered human material which the well prepared aggression of 1914 has brought within her power.

HYPOCRISY AND TRUTH.

"My orders," declares von Bissing, "rest on a sound basis of legislative considerations, which are

* See, for instance, the German Etappen-Kommandant's demand for a list of women at Antoin, p. 67 above.

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to put the great interests of the whole above the freedom of the individual falsely understood by the workers. . . .

“Since there are hundreds of thousands unemployed in Belgium, while there is ample work in Germany, the employment of Belgian labour in Germany becomes an economic and social duty. . . .”

This apology of von Bissing's simply wraps up indefensible facts in high-sounding phrases. “The great interests of the whole” mean simply the interests of Germany in keeping up her fighting power, which are directly contrary to the interests of Belgium. “The freedom of the individual falsely understood” means the sacred right of the Belgian workman, as a Belgian citizen, to refuse work in the invaders' service designed for the injury of his own country. “Hundreds of thousands are unemployed in Belgium” because the deliberate policy of the invaders deprived them of employment. “There is ample work in Germany” because Germany, waging a world-war of her own making, has to provide herself daily with unprecedented quantities of supplies and munitions, and is faced, after two and a half years of war, with a serious deficit of native German manpower. “The economic and social duty” which von Bissing professes himself justified in exacting by compulsion from his Belgian victims is the function of replacing with their own labour the labour of able-bodied German men hitherto retained perforce in necessary war-industries in the interior of Germany,

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and so releasing these men to fill the gaps in the German military forces.

All von Bissing's words cannot hide the truth that we are witnessing, in the deportations, the crowning German outrage against the Belgian people. In 1914 the Belgians were attacked, ruined, and massacred. In 1915 they were stripped of their manufactures and raw materials, their capital and plant. In 1916 they are being exploited like their own cattle and machines by the State which has inflicted all these outrages upon them. They are being deported forcibly to Germany and compelled by violence to labour there, that their labour may assist Germany to secure the fruits of her crimes and to evade a just retribution for them at the hands of Belgium and her Allies.

APPENDIX OF DOCUMENTS

This appendix is not exhaustive. There are many German official proclamations, dealing with the Deportations, of which the text is not yet in our possession, and there are many protests by Belgian public bodies and individuals which are as admirable as those printed here, but which add little to the facts or arguments presented in these.

The following documents are accordingly here omitted :—

- (i) Protest dated November 11th, 1916, and signed by about five hundred members of Belgian judicial bodies.*
- (ii) Opinion by Professor E. Nys, of the University of Brussels, a Belgian authority on International Law.*
- (iii) Protest, dated November 9th, 1916, of the Senators and Deputies of Belgium present at Brussels (signed by four Ministers of State, nineteen Senators, and twenty-four Representatives).*
- (iv) Protest, dated November 2nd, 1916, of the Senator and Deputies of the Arrondissement of Mons.*

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I.

PROCLAMATION BY BARON VON HUENE,
MILITARY GOVERNOR OF ANTWERP, FROM
THE GERMAN VERSION REPRODUCED IN
THE DUTCH JOURNAL "DE AMSTER-
DAMMER," NOVEMBER 18TH, 1916.

CITY OF ANTWERP

The following communication is made to the
population by permission of the German Military
Authorities :—

It is hereby expressly declared :

- (1) That members of the Civic Guard who have
laid down their arms will not be interfered with ;
- (2) That there is no question of taking Belgian
young men to Germany or forcing them into
service in the German Army ;
- (3) That Belgian soldiers in civilian clothes will be
considered as prisoners of war, and must report
themselves at the Kommandantur immediately
upon their return. Anyone neglecting to report
himself immediately will become liable under
the Regulations of War.

The Governor of Antwerp,

(signed) BARON VON HUENE.

For the Corporation of Mayor and Aldermen,

By Order,

Assistant City Clerk,

(signed) HUBERT MELIS.

The Mayor,

(signed) JAN DE VOS.

For the Inter-communal Committee,

(signed) LOUIS FRANCK.

Antwerp,

October 18th, 1914.

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II.

RESOLUTION OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF TOURNAI, DATED OCTOBER 20TH, 1916.

In the matter of the requisition made by the German authorities on October 20th, 1916 (requisition of a list of workmen to be drawn up by the Municipality) . . .

The Municipal Council resolves to maintain its attitude of refusal.

It further feels it its duty to place on record the following :—

The City of Tournai is prepared to submit unreservedly to all the exigencies authorised by the laws and customs of war. Its sincerity cannot be questioned. For more than two years it has submitted to the German Occupation, during which time it has lodged and lived at close quarters with the German troops, yet it has displayed perfect composure and has refrained itself from any act of hostility, proving thereby that it is animated by no idle spirit of bravado.

But the City could not bring itself to provide arms for use against its own children, knowing well that natural law and the law of nations (which is the expression of natural law) both forbid such action.

In his declaration dated September 2nd, 1914, the German Governor-General of Belgium declared : “ I ask none to renounce his patriotic sentiments.”

The City of Tournai reposes confidence in this declaration, which it is bound to consider as the sentiment of the German Emperor, in whose name the Governor-General was speaking. In accepting the inspiration of honour and patriotism, the City is loyal to a fundamental duty, the loftiness of which must be apparent to any German officer.

The City is confident that the straightforwardness and clearness of this attitude will prevent any misunderstanding arising between itself and the German Army.

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III.

GERMAN REPLY TO THE RESOLUTION OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF TOURNAI.

Tournai, October 23rd, 1916.

No. 17404.

Mob. Et. K.S. des IBIK.

PUNITIVE TAXATION.

(*Ref.* Your letter of October 20th, 1916. No. 7458.)

In permitting itself, through the medium of Municipal Resolutions, to oppose the orders of the German Military Authorities in the occupied territory, the City is guilty of an unexampled arrogance and of a complete misunderstanding of the situation created by the state of war.

The "clear and simple situation" is in reality the following:—

The Military Authorities order the City to obey. Otherwise the City must bear the heavy consequences, as I have pointed out in my previous explanations.

The General Commanding the Army has inflicted on the City—on account of its refusal, up to date, to furnish the lists demanded—a punitive contribution of 200,000 marks, which must be paid within the next six days, beginning with to-day. The General also adds that until such time as all the lists demanded are in his hands, for every day in arrear, beginning with December 31st, 1916, a sum of 20,000 marks will be paid by the City.

(Signed) HOPFER, MAJOR-GENERAL,
Etappen-Kommandant.

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IV.

PROTEST OF THE DEPUTIES AND SENATORS OF ANTWERP.

Antwerp, November 7th, 1916.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

Under an Order of the Military Governor of Antwerp, issued in pursuance of the instructions of the German Governor-General in Belgium, and dated November 2nd, 1916, our fellow-citizens who are out of work and whose names are on the list of the *Meldeamt*, are at this moment under summons to present themselves at the Southern Station. From there they will be transported, if necessary by force, to Germany, to be there compelled to take up whatever work may be assigned to them.

The same measures have been taken in the rest of the country.

Without sentence, without having committed any crime, thousands of free citizens are thus deported against their will into enemy territory, far from their homes, far from their wives and children, to undergo there the most rigorous treatment to which a free man can be condemned—to work under coercion.

All we, Deputies, Senators, and Notables of Antwerp and its urban area, should consider that we utterly failed in our duty if we allowed such action to take place before our eyes without availing ourselves of the right we possess to address ourselves under all circumstances to the Executive Power, in order to present our complaints, reservations, or protests.

By what right has forced labour, accompanied by deportation, been introduced into our unhappy country? That is the question to which we are vainly demanding an answer.

The law of nations condemns such measures. There is not one modern authority who justifies them. The text of the Hague Convention, which limits the right of requisitions to the needs of the Army of Occupation,

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is in direct contradiction to them. The constitutional law of all European countries, including Germany, is in equal opposition to them. The most illustrious of your rulers, Frederick II., gave the sanctity of a dogma to individual liberty, and to the right of every citizen to employ his capacities and his labour as he may think good. The Occupying Power must respect these essential principles, which for centuries have been incorporated in the common patrimony of humanity.

It is incontestable that Belgian Labour, deported in pursuance of the measures with which we are concerned, releases a proportional number of German workmen, and leaves them free to go and fight against the brothers and sons of the workmen who are being obtained by force. This patently involves co-operation in the war against our country, which is forbidden in terms by Article 52 of the Hague Convention.

This is not all. Immediately after the occupation of Antwerp, hundreds of thousands of our fellow-citizens had left the country and taken refuge in Holland in the districts along the frontier. The most reassuring declarations were made to them by the German Authorities.

On October 9th, 1914, General von Beseler, in supreme command of the besieging army, submitted to the envoys sent to Contich a declaration to the effect that "Civic Guards who have been disarmed will not be treated as prisoners of war. . . . None of your fellow-citizens will be disturbed."

On the same date, Lieutenant-General von Schütz, appointed to the command of the fortress of Antwerp, issued the following declaration :—

"The undersigned, being Commandant of the fortress of Antwerp, declares that there is nothing to prevent the return of the inhabitants to their homes. *None of them will be molested.*

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“Members of the Civic Guard, if they have been disarmed, *can return in complete security.*”

On October 16th, 1914, Cardinal Mercier communicated to the population a declaration signed by Baron von Huene, Military Governor of Antwerp, in which he said in terms, and with a view to publication:—

“Young men need have no fear of being carried off to Germany, either to be enrolled in the Army or to be subjected to forced labour.”

Shortly afterwards His Eminence the Primate of Belgium requested Baron von der Goltz, Governor-General of Belgium, to ratify for the whole country, and without any limit of time, the pledges given him by General von Huene for the Province of Antwerp. *His request was satisfied.*

Finally, on October 16th, 1914, the German Military Authorities at Antwerp transmitted to the representatives of General van Terwisga, commanding the Dutch Army in the field, a signed declaration not only confirming the promise that young men and Civic Guards who had been disarmed might return to Belgium “without being disturbed,” but adding further that “the rumour to the effect that young Belgians will be taken to Germany . . . *is entirely without foundation.*”

It was on the faith of these solemn public declarations that numbers of citizens, not only of Antwerp but of all parts of Belgium, re-crossed the frontier and returned to their homes.

These men who returned to Belgium after such explicit pledges are to be sent to-morrow to Germany, to be compelled there to that forced labour from which they had been promised immunity. Under these circumstances, we feel ourselves justified in demanding the repeal of the measure.

We wish to add that the Treaty of Contich explicitly

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stipulates that the Civic Guards shall not be treated as prisoners of war. There can, therefore, be no question of transporting them to Germany to undergo a more rigorous treatment still. The preamble of the Order with which we are concerned seems to take our workmen to task for their inactivity; it appeals to solicitude for public order, and is disturbed by the growing burden upon public charity.

We shall permit ourselves to point out to your Excellency that at the time of the German invasion there were in Belgium considerable reserves of raw material, which it would have taken innumerable workmen a long time to work up. These stocks have been removed and transported to Germany. There were factories, completely equipped, which could have manufactured for export to neutral countries. The machine-tools and other portions of the plant were removed in large quantities and sent to Germany.

It is certainly a fact that our workmen have refused work offered by the Occupying Power, because this work was of a nature to assist that Power in its military operations. Rather than high wages earned at this price they have preferred privations. But what patriot or what man of feeling would not admire these poor people for the dignity and courage displayed in such a choice?

Our working-classes cannot, then, be reproached for inactivity. In their love of work they are second to none.

The Order also appeals to solicitude for public order, and concerns itself with leaving as few unemployed as possible to be a burden on public charity.

Public order has not been disturbed. As for social assistance, it is true that millions have been spent in relief for the unemployed since the beginning of the war in Belgium. But in aid of this immense effort of national solidarity, nothing has been asked of the German Government, or even of the Belgian Treasury, which

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is administered under your supervision and maintained by our contributions.

Germany need not be disturbed by solicitude for money which does not come out of her pocket, and your Excellency is well aware that it is not public charity but the National Committee which provides the funds for this supremely necessary work, and will continue to provide them in the future as it has done in the past.

None of the motives appealed to in support of this new policy appear to us to be well founded. In the history of war during the last two centuries one would search in vain for a precedent. Neither in the wars of the Revolution and of the Empire, nor in those which have desolated Europe since then, has anyone ever tampered with the sacred principle of individual liberty, which is the right of peaceful and unoffending populations.

What halting-place would there be on this road if such treatment could be justified by reasons of State? Even in the Colonies forced labour has disappeared in our times.

Consequently, we beg your Excellency to take into consideration the facts which we have submitted to your Excellency, and to restore to their homes those of our fellow-citizens who have been deported to Germany as a result of the Order of November 2nd, 1916.

V.

CARDINAL MERCIER'S FINAL LETTER.

Archbishopric of Malines,
November 10th, 1916.

MONSIEUR LE GOUVERNEUR-GÉNÉRAL,—

I refrain from expressing to your Excellency the sentiments aroused in me by your Excellency's letter (1,10051) in answer to the letter I had the honour to address to your Excellency on October 19th last on the subject of the deportation of the "unemployed."

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I have a melancholy recollection of the words which your Excellency, stressing every syllable, pronounced in my presence after your Excellency's arrival at Brussels:—"I hope our relations will be loyal. . . . I have the mission of staunching the wounds of Belgium."

My letter of October 19th reminded your Excellency of the pledge given by Baron von Huene, Military Governor of Antwerp, and ratified several days later by Baron von der Goltz, your Excellency's predecessor as Governor-General of Brussels. The pledge was explicit and unconditional, and without any limit of time:—"Young men need have no fear of being carried off to Germany, either to be enrolled in the Army or to be subjected to forced labour."

During the last fortnight this pledge has been violated, thousands of times over, every day.

Baron von Huene and the late Baron von der Goltz made no reservation of the kind implied in your despatch of October 26th:—"If the occupation does not last more than two years, men suitable for military service will not be placed in captivity." They said unconditionally:—"Young men, and *a fortiori* men who have reached a mature age, will not, *at any moment while the occupation lasts, either be imprisoned or be subjected to forced labour.*"

In justification, your Excellency adduces the conduct of England and France, who have, your Excellency says, "seized on board neutral vessels all Germans between the ages of seventeen and fifty, and have then interned them in concentration camps." But if England and France had committed an injustice, the English and French ought to have been the objects of your vengeance, and not a people that is unoffending and unarmed. But has an injustice been committed? We are poorly informed about what passes beyond the walls of our prison-house; but I am strongly inclined to believe

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that the Germans so arrested and interned belonged to the Reserve of the Imperial German Army. If so, they were soldiers whom England and France had a right to intern in their concentration camps.

Belgium, on the contrary, only introduced Universal Military Service from the month of August, 1913. Belgians between the ages of seventeen and fifty now resident in the occupied parts of Belgium are therefore civilians and non-combatants. It is playing with words to class them with the German Reservists by applying to them the equivocal title of "men capable of military service."

The decrees, the placards, the press comments—designed to prepare public opinion for the measures now put into execution—dwelt especially upon two considerations: The unemployed, it was said, are a danger to public security; and they are a charge on official charity.

It is not true, as I have already said in my letter of October 19th, that our workmen have troubled, or even threatened anywhere, the public order. Five million Belgians and several hundred Americans have been amazed witnesses of the faultless dignity and patience of our working-class. It is not true that the workmen deprived of employment are a charge either upon the Occupying Power or upon the charity subject to its administration. The National Committee, in which the Occupying Power has no active part, is alone responsible for the relief of the victims of compulsory unemployment.

These two replies have been left unanswered. The letter of October 26th attempts another method of justification. It alleges that the measures now taken against the unemployed flow from "social and economic causes."

It is because the German Government has the interests

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of the Belgian nation at heart more warmly and more intelligently than we have that the German Government is saving the workman from idleness and preventing him from losing his technical aptitude.

Forced labour is the fair price for the economic advantages brought us by our commercial exchanges with the German Empire.

Moreover, if Belgium has to complain of this state of things, let her address herself to England. With England rests the supreme guilt. "It is she who, by her policy of isolation, has created this pressure."

This defence, which in the original text is halting and complicated, can be answered sufficiently by several frank and brief declarations.

Every Belgian workman will liberate a German workman, who will make one soldier more for the German Army. That is simple enough, and it is the fact which dominates the situation. The author of the letter is himself conscious of this flagrant fact, for he writes:—"The measure has nothing to do, either, with the conduct of the war *properly understood*." Presumably, then, it has to do with the war *improperly understood*. And what does that mean, if not that the Belgian workman, though he is not taking up arms himself, is freeing the hands of the German workman who will take them up? The Belgian workman is compelled to co-operate, in an indirect but unmistakable fashion, in the war against his country. This is in manifest contradiction to the spirit of the Hague Convention.

Another declaration—the unemployment is the work neither of the Belgian workman nor of England. It is the result of the German régime of occupation.

The Occupying Power has taken possession of considerable stocks of raw materials intended for our national industry. It has seized and despatched to Germany the machines, tools, and metals in our factories and

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workshops. This eliminated the possibility of national industry, and the workman was left with the alternative of working for the German Empire—either here or in Germany—or of unemployment. A few tens of thousands of workmen, under the pressure of fear or of hunger, agreed, mostly with reluctance, to work for the foreigner. But 400,000 working men and women preferred to resign themselves to unemployment, with all its privations, rather than injure the interests of their country. They lived in poverty with the aid of the scanty relief which the National Relief Committee, under the high patronage of the Spanish, American, and Dutch Ministers, was able to allot to them. They submitted to their hard lot with composure, with dignity, and without a murmur. There has nowhere been either a revolt or the least sign of it. Masters and workmen waited with constancy for the end of our long trial. At the same time, the communal authorities and private initiative tried to reduce the undeniable difficulties of unemployment, but the Occupying Power paralysed their efforts. The National Committee tried to organise technical instruction for the benefit of the unemployed. This practical instruction was to respect the dignity of our workers, it was to keep them in practice, to improve their capacity for work, to prepare for the resurrection of the country. Who opposed this noble project which had been worked out by our great employers of labour? It was the Occupying Power.

Nevertheless, the communes made every effort to have works of public utility carried out by their unemployed. The Governor-General made these undertakings subject to official authorisation, which was, as a general rule, refused. I am assured that the cases are not rare in which the Government authorised works of this kind on the express condition that they should not be given to the unemployed.

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Unemployment, then, was desired. The army of the unemployed was being deliberately recruited. And, in face of this, our workmen have actually been insulted with the name of idlers.

No, the Belgian workman is not an idler. He is a devotee of work.

In the noble contests of economic life he has won his spurs. When he disdained the highly-paid work offered him by the Occupying Power, it was his patriotic dignity which inspired him. We, the shepherd of our people, who follow more closely than ever their griefs and sorrows, we know what it has cost them sometimes to choose independence with privation instead of well-being with subservience.

Cast no stones at them. They have the right to your respect.

The letter of October 26th states that the primary responsibility for the unemployment of our workmen rests upon England, because she does not allow raw materials to pass into Belgium.

England very generously does allow to pass into Belgium supplies of foodstuffs under the control of neutral States—Spain, the United States, and Holland. Subject to the same control, she would certainly allow the importation of materials necessary for industry, if Germany would pledge herself to leave them to us and not to lay hands on the manufactured products of our industrial labour.

But Germany—by various methods, notably by the organisation of her “Zentral-Stellen,” over which neither we Belgians nor the neutral Ministers can exercise any effective control—is already absorbing a considerable part of the agricultural and industrial products of the country. This is producing a considerable rise in the cost of living, which is causing, in turn, severe privations to those who have no savings. The “community of

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interests," with all its boasted advantages for us, is not the normal equilibrium of commercial exchanges, but the predominance of the strong over the weak.

Do not, I beg you, represent this condition of economic inferiority to which we are reduced as a privilege sufficient to justify forced labour for the profit of our enemies and the deportation of legions of innocents to the land of exile.

Slavery and the severest penalty in the penal code after the death penalty, the penalty of deportation! Had Belgium, which never did you an injury, deserved at your hands this treatment, which cries for vengeance to Heaven?

Monsieur le Gouverneur-Général, at the beginning of my letter I recalled your Excellency's noble words: "I have come to Belgium with the mission of staunching your country's wounds." If your Excellency could enter working homes as we clergy can, and could hear the lamentations of wives and mothers, whom your orders have thrown into mourning and consternation, your Excellency would better understand that the wound of the Belgian people is a gaping one!

Two years ago, we hear them saying, it was death, pillage, incendiarism, but that was war! To-day it is no longer war, but cold calculation, deliberate annihilation, the empire of might over right, the degradation of human personality, a challenge to humanity.

It is in your Excellency's power to silence these cries of outraged conscience. May God, on Whom we call with all the ardour of our heart on behalf of our oppressed people, inspire in you the pity of the Good Samaritan!

Accept, Monsieur le Gouverneur-Général, the homage of my high consideration.

(Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER,
Archbishop of Malines.

To HIS EXCELLENCY

BARON VON BISSING,
Governor-General at Brussels.

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VI.

THE DEPORTATION AT WAVRE: STATEMENT BY AN EYE-WITNESS.

Reprinted from "The Daily Telegraph," December 13, 1916.

The district of Wavre (Brabant) consists of twenty-two communes—there are 2,800 communes in Belgium. The Order which summoned at Wavre the entire male population, between the ages of seventeen to fifty-six, of twenty-two villages of the district of that name—about 10,000 men—was posted on November 14th, and read :—

"NOTICE.

"All men between the ages of seventeen and fifty-six (inclusive) of the commune of — are requested to present themselves on November 15th, 1916, at eight o'clock a.m. (German time), at Wavre market-place. The Burgomaster should be present. The men concerned should be carrying their identity cards, and, in case of need, their meldekarte (card of control). Small hand-baggage will be allowed. Those who fail to appear will be immediately transported without delay, and by force, to the places where they are to work. Besides, they are liable to very heavy fines and long imprisonment. Priests, doctors, lawyers, schoolmasters, and professors need not present themselves.

"Ottignies, November 3rd, 1916.

"The Imperial Kreischef of Nivelles,

"GRAF VON SCHWERIN."

So it is for to-morrow. And the notice was not posted until seven o'clock in the morning, an hour when all men who are not out of work are already in the factories or in the yards. They were expecting, they were fearing this Order. But, without doubt, they had had a forlorn hope that it would be delayed; a vague hope, one of

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those hopes which instinct keeps alive against all reasoning, in the souls of the people. Undoubtedly they had not believed it. They did not believe it until, when the notice was posted, suddenly, among the women and children came the panic-stricken desolation of complete surprise. The workers, who did not know of it, had to be warned; they had to be warned so that they might have time to prepare, so that this day they might spend with their dear ones—the last, perhaps—and together take such precautions, poor, unavailable, such as were possible. The weeping women went to fetch their men, to take them back to their homes; and there there were heartbreaking scenes, poignant but admirable in the feelings of simple, stoical devotion which they reveal. The greater part of these homes are poor; two years of war, of dear living, of rations have brought about destitution; there is nothing in the house but the portion of food strictly measured for each one; and to-morrow, if the father, if the eldest son is sent away, there will be no more resources. That matters nothing; there is no thought except for the beloved being who is threatened; in the bundle they are preparing they put the last warm garment, the last blanket, all the bread they have left, everything—to-morrow, indeed, when he is gone, who will want to eat!

A MELANCHOLY PROCESSION.

They must be at Wavre at eight o'clock, says the Order. And, for the greater part of the men summoned, the way to the chief town of the canton is long; one hour, two hours. There are no more farm wagons in the country; there are no more trains. They must walk, carrying their bags. So they must leave early. Before six o'clock the procession, the melancholy and interminable procession, begins on the roads, in the biting cold, the dark November morning, the freezing

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wind, for the weather is cruel, Nature, menacing and dark, accentuating the anguish in their hearts. But they must be strong. The impression of despair must not be given. Most of the men have forbidden their families to accompany them ; the anguish of the separation might make them show weakness. This must not be, so nearly all of them are going alone. One sees, marching to their Calvary, only groups of men, marching in silence, and heavily, heavily, as if their poor, meagre bundles were very heavy. Only a few women, who have not been able to control themselves, follow, weeping. Here is Wavre. The little village lies grim and grey on this sad morning. It is hemmed in by troops, who, at all openings, bar the way. Men are engulfed in the narrow streets leading to the market-place, the huge square, with its low houses, with shaky façades, sorrowful remains of a savage invasion. It has been completely evacuated, and all the roads which lead to it are empty. Only one can see, at the end of those roads behind the warring troops, the crowd from which come cries, names, words of encouragement, or even words of farewell, to the poor people, rounded up, village by village, who are waiting, dejectedly, pitiful in their impotence and their humiliation. A few among them remember, with a little sorrowful smile, that yesterday in the same place there had been a pig market.

CHOOSING THE SLAVES.

The work of choosing begins. By groups of a thousand, the men are conducted to a school-building, where the agent of the German authorities keeps office. To get at this school-building the road runs by the banks of the Dyle. It is the picturesque spot of Wavre. In normal times there is an atmosphere of peaceful gaiety, of cheerfulness. This morning, at the windows of the houses, the anguished faces of women, of children, of

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old people in tears. There are people on the roofs. They all gaze greedily at the passing lines. They want to see once more, perhaps for the last time, a husband, a son, a brother, perhaps a fiancé. After a wait of four hours the crowd is finally conducted to the school. I watched the men. I know a number of them. I saw a lot of their faces grow suddenly very pale. They walked in very firmly, but they are ghastly pale. One feels the anxiety which freezes them, arrests the blood in their veins. These are the married men, the men who have just left wife and children, and who ask themselves, are they going to see them again very soon? If not, not for a long period, one never knows, perhaps never. The others, the young men, go with a proud step. There is defiance in their eyes. As they approach the school-house all the heads are raised, listening. A rumour, a sound which grows, grows—it is—yes, it is, singing. Almost one would say it was the “Brabançonne,” yes, and that was the “Marseillaise” coming from the courtyard of the school. And, in fact, at the end of that courtyard are the men who have already been taken. It is they who are singing the Belgian and French anthems. When they see us they all cry out: “Don’t sign, don’t sign.” They are splendid. There is no anguish here. They are over that, full of bravado, a rude pride, a masculine virility. There are no complaints. When one among the men sees a friend released he asks him only to tell his family that he has been sent away; and then he starts to sing again, passionately, singing his song of defiance.

THE WORD OF FATE.

We go in by a first room. A doctor is there, who examines those men who are armed with a medical certificate. He seems indulgent, quite generous; he liberates some of them. A second room. Here the

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fate of each man will be decided, brusquely, mechanically, in a few seconds, and without appeal. One peremptory word, and it is slavery—or freedom. Here are many uniforms—Kreischef, civil commissary officers—and all have that military rigidity which permits of no discussion. The three delegates of the commune—generally the burgomaster, an alderman, and the communal secretary—authorised to assist in the examination of their own villagers, can quite evidently do nothing. Two officers, who divide the duty between them, make the decisions. One on each side of the room, they examine the men rapidly, beginning with the young men of seventeen to twenty-five years of age. They look at the identity card, which gives the trade and social position of the holder. They throw a glance over the man, as if to weigh his strength, his value as an animal. One question, at the tip of his tongue, for the sake of formality: “Are you unemployed?” and immediately, whether the reply is negative or affirmative, the decree, inexorable. If the card gives a trade which would be useful “là-bas,” the officer cries, “Left turn.” Left turn! That is the road to Germany. To go out of the room they must go through a door divided by a barrier into two narrow corridors and guarded by two soldiers. The left-hand corridor gives access to another room, where are gathered those who are to go.

If the officer cries “Right turn!” it is liberty. The man passes before an under-officer, who puts a stamp on his identity card. The right-hand corridor leads to an open window, before which is a table. They must climb that table, on to another table placed outside the window, and jump down into the street. It looks like an escape. It is, indeed, an impression of flight. There is no impression of relief or comfort, for the heart is still torn, thinking of the others, the poor others. And then the nightmare is not yet at an end. One must

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still contemplate the abominable, torturing sorrow. One must still gather unforgettable remembrances of pity and paralysed indignation. At the end of the little side street here is the crowd. It has grown. It was lasting too long, it was too much anxiety; from all the villages the women had come—the mothers, the wives, the fiancées, weeping. They catch hold of those who have returned, demanding news, sobbing. Is he taken, he for whom they are waiting, their beloved, the chief, the prop of the house, the man whose departure ends everything? They do not know, they cannot reply; they come out into the midst of imploring women, into the midst of the poor, sobbing people, for they are all sobbing, even those who can again clasp to their hearts their man who has been given to them.

HARROWING LAST SCENES.

During this time what goes on to the left, to the left in that room where are those who must go? There, each man as he arrives is asked if he will sign an agreement, that is, consent to work for the Germans, earning meanwhile a large salary. If he consents, he gives his name and address, and he is authorised to return to his home, so that he may make his preparations and depart at the end of a few days. If he refuses—and that is the case with an immense majority—he is menaced, threatened with all calamities, and goes to join the tumultuous group of those who did as he did, dignified and unbending, and he is greeted with cheers, as for a victory—the victory of a man who submits, but whose spirit has no submission. We are still waiting. They are waiting for the number to be sufficiently large. When it is, it is surrounded by soldiers with fixed bayonets, and encircled by cavalry. Then it is “*en route* for the station.” Two officers

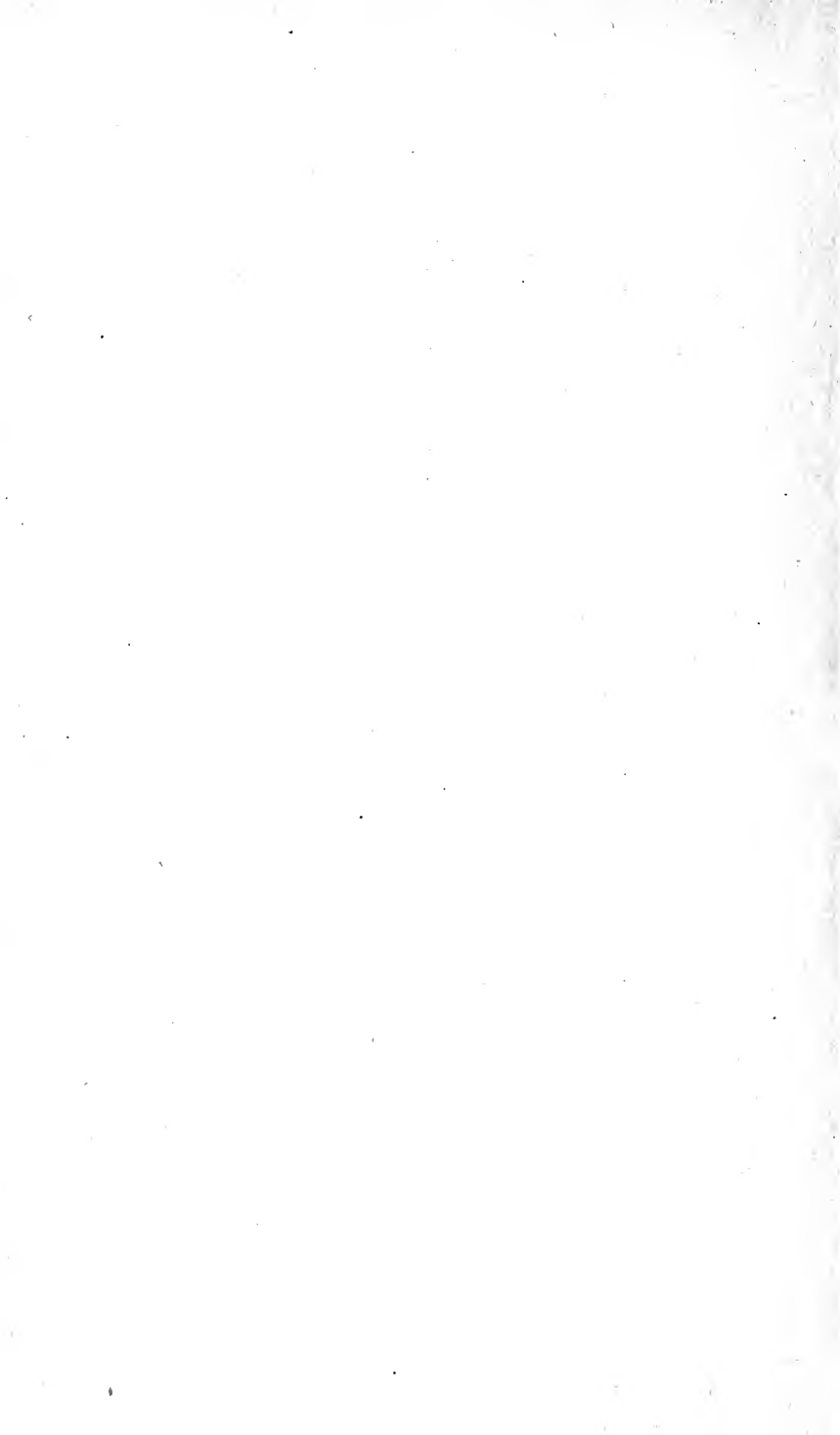
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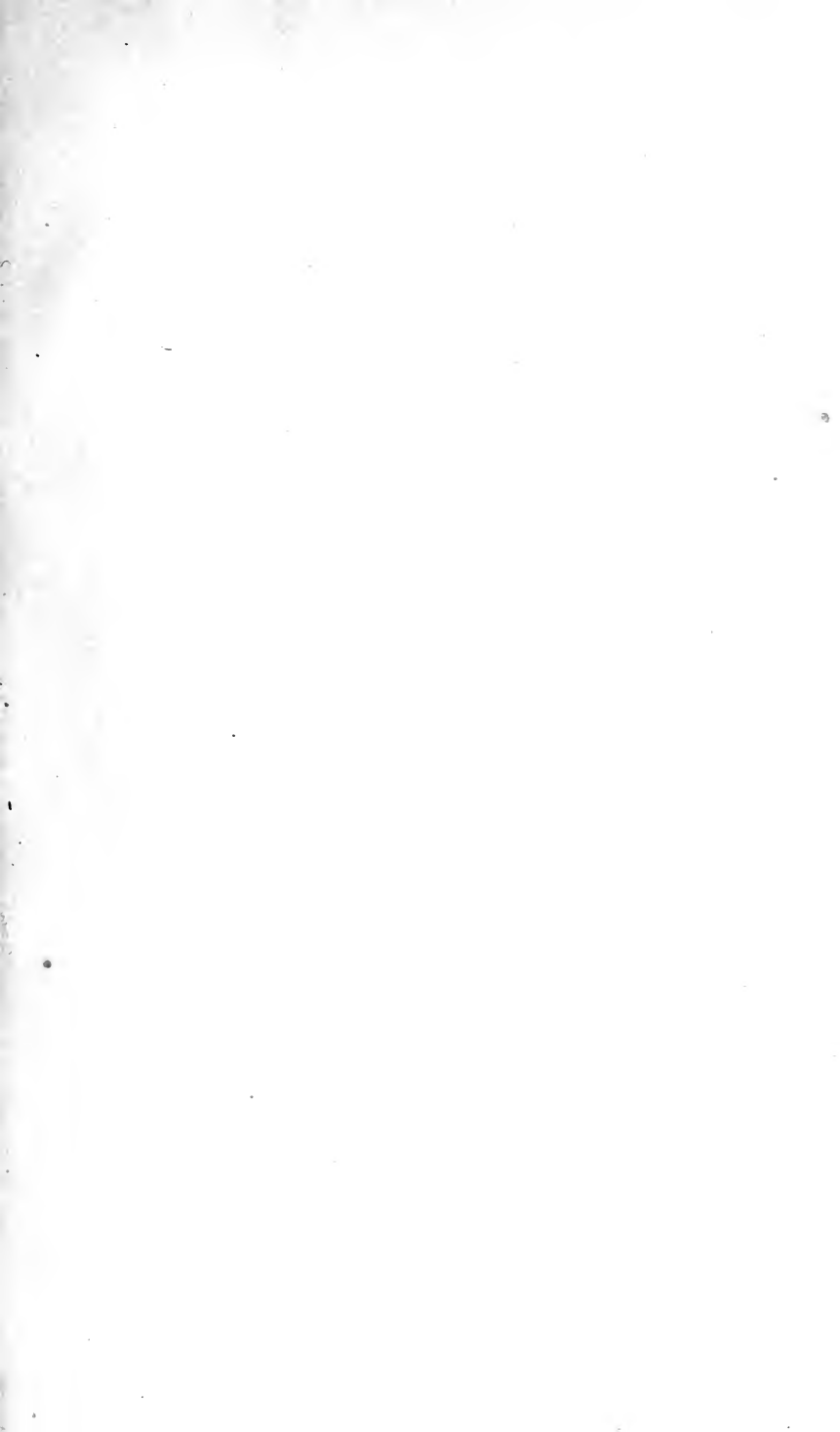
march a little in advance, their horsewhips—yes, their horsewhips—in their hands. The side streets are followed. From time to time a weeping woman, an old man, having come thus far by the most tremendous effort, manages to slip between the ranks, for one last farewell, for a supreme embrace, but at once the soldiers push them back—at once, often before that longed-for embrace. On the main street, which is reached, at the windows of the houses, the poor people still watch, watch with their dry, fevered eyes, reddened with tears, and almost mechanically wave their handkerchiefs. But those whom they thus salute do not wish to break down. Is it to reassure the courage of those dear ones who see them thus ? Is it in order to prevent an exhibition of weakness before those soldiers who are guarding them ? Nearly all of them march with head high ; they wave their hats, and they sing, they sing unceasingly, as they sang in the courtyard of the school. But there are voices that are husky and full of tears. They march. At each corner of a street there is a short struggle. Always one or another of the prisoners tries to escape, but always a horseman pursues him and brings him back to the ranks, unless, by a stinging blow from his whip, one of the officers has not already sent him back. And then the man, pale, his fists clenched, is quiet for a few minutes. What passes in his thoughts ? What passes in the hearts of those others who, marching by their homes, throw themselves into the arms of their wives, kiss their children, and are torn from them by a soldier ? They are quiet, too. But pretty soon, once again, they are singing, with a louder voice. They are not going to break down.

Finally, the procession comes to a level crossing. They are collected on the rails, between two embankments. The station is quite close, and a train of cattle-trucks is in waiting. One can see nothing more. One hears

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only shouts, songs, the “Brabançonne,” and the “Marseillaise” again. This lasts a long time, a very long time—hours. Night has fallen. About six o’clock, suddenly, the singing voices are drowned by trumpet calls. Music? Yes, they have sent into the station a regimental band, and it is this band that celebrates, with the accented music of a military march, the departure of that train, unlighted, lugubrious; that train, whose passing over the level-crossing rouses such despairing sorrow and emotion that old men and the women fall fainting, to the ironic sounds of that military march, quick, exasperating. They have gone. But where? No one knows. What to do? No one knows. Will they ever come back? No one knows. No one knows. No one knows. What we do know is that from now on we shall live with that heartrending memory, and the anguish. And even if they come back, never again can they live in security, that security of the old days, when it was thought that such things were no longer possible.





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